

Scotpress



ENTERPRISE -

LOG ENTRIES 79

a star trek  
fanzine



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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 79.

First, an appeal. If anyone has a current address for Martin Delaney, could they please let us know so that we can send his contributor's copy.

We are delighted at the response to IDIC; not only many old friends, but also new names have joined, and everyone has commented enthusiastically both on our choice of name, and on Gene's letter. It did come as quite a surprise to us to discover that the name had not been used for a British club before.

Plans are in hand for the first issues of a club zine, which we hope to have ready for SOL III. As a start, Sheila and I have gathered together some of our stories that were printed other than in our own zines, many in the United States, and were not widely available in this country. This allows us to get a club zine out fairly quickly, and will also allow time to receive the submissions we hope you will send us. (Thanks to those who already have!)

Our first Next Generation zine, Make It So 1, featuring 'Becoming Friends' by Karen Sparks, is now ready, and costs £2.90.

As usual, we are looking for submissions of fiction, poetry and artwork - to all our zines; either series-based for Log Entries, 'Next Generation'-based for Make It So, or either of these for IDIC. Since we are now putting out zines under two press names, could you please indicate on your manuscript which press the story is for, IDIC or Scotpress. Any submissions to either of the addresses below.

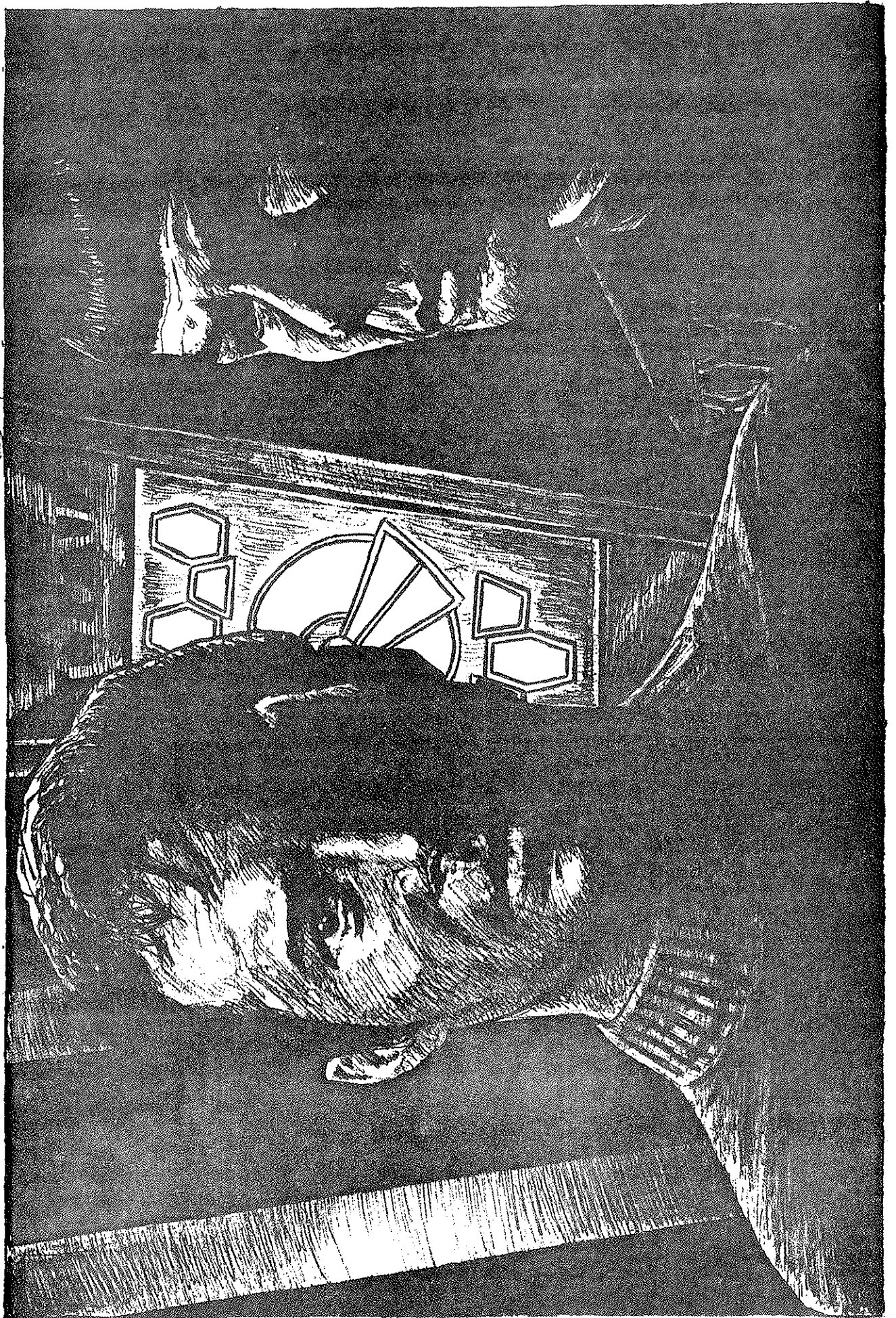
We are looking for action-adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but for Scotpress even these should not be movie-based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These are, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..." For IDIC zines our policy is much simpler; no X-rated stories, please! Anything else will be considered, as long as it is primarily about the established Trek universe characters or races - for example, we would consider a story that was wholly about Klingons or Romulans as these races appear in Trek. We are not, however, in the market for stories that are solely about totally original characters or races of the writers' own creation as this is entering the realms of original Science Fiction rather than Star Trek.



Submissions may be sent to either -

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# DELENNIA

by

Teresa Abbott

Spock came round slowly and reluctantly, the tendrils of sensation creeping relentlessly into his mind and forcing him gradually awake: the softness of the bed beneath him; the covers warm about him; a cool breeze on his face, and sunlight over his eyelids.

Puzzled, but not yet apprehensive, he slowly opened his eyes, and glancing around recognised that he was in the same room which he had been allocated the previous night.

Throwing back the covers, he slowly swung his legs over the side of the bed, and swayed slightly as the sudden movement caused a wave of nausea. For the first time he began to feel alarmed at the peculiar lassitude of his body, and his inability to remember a reason for his drowsiness. Usually his waking was just a brief instant between a state of rest and a state of awareness. The sensations he was experiencing now were not unlike those he had felt the many times he had come round in sickbay following medication.

Growing ever more alarmed at his inability to find a reason for the state he found himself in, he wondered if perhaps he had indeed been injured in some way, and someone had administered a sedative. Thoughtfully, he turned his mind inwards, exploring the functions of his body, checking to see if any of them had in fact been damaged. Metabolism, bone structure, body chemistry, digestion, mind... as he sensed with horror the intrusion he touched in his brain, he found himself lurching across the room and activating the connecting doorway.

In the adjoining room he could see that Kirk still slept peacefully, the sunlight from the open windows dancing on the covers. But as Spock saw his Captain's head resting on the pillows, the memories of the previous night finally came flooding back in their entirety, and he was unable to prevent a low cry passing his lips as he realised the full enormity of exactly what had been done to them, and why.

The Enterprise had slipped into orbit around Vyrana the previous morning. One of the earliest Federation members, it appeared to be a textbook case of a happy, well-managed planet. Remarkably like Earth environmentally, it enjoyed a pleasant climate, and a high level of technological development, without showing any of the signs of aggression that had been found on some other planets.

There were two dominant species, one humanoid in appearance, the other looking more like upright cats. These had short, black fur all over their bodies, and were known collectively as the Vernax.

Surprisingly, there seemed to be no animosity between the two

species. Admittedly, centuries before there had been records of conflict, but for the last two hundred years or so they had lived in harmony, with no outward signs of prejudice. Members of both species were included in the planetary government (although Spock remarked with interest that no humanoid had ever achieved the rank of planetary President).

As Federation members they were ideal, their Ambassadors to Starfleet never making any controversial or inflammatory statements, and as they seemed to manage their planetary affairs so efficiently, they were left largely to their own devices. Most contact with the Federation was thus restricted to the many traders who passed through its numerous space ports.

It was with some surprise, therefore, that Starfleet had received a request for assistance from the President, one Kaleb the Sixth. The Enterprise, being the nearest Starship in the sector, had been asked to assist in whatever way possible.

Protocol alone would have demanded that the most senior officers beam down, but as it was the Captain and Spock were more than pleased to visit the planet. Both of them shared the curiosity that drove them to want to know as much as possible about other species, and both were looking forward to the break on what was reputed to be a remarkably pleasant and comfortable world.

They were met by a small party of officials, and after a brief tour of the capital city were taken to meet the President. They were shown into a large, pleasant room, and as the door closed behind them they found themselves alone with Kaleb the Sixth.

The President sat at a table in the centre of the room, and indicated that they should do likewise.

"Gentlemen, forgive my getting straight down to business, but the request I have to make of you will only take a few minutes, and you will then have the rest of the day free to sample the many entertainments we have provided."

The President spoke perfect Federation Standard, without accent, and Kirk was secretly amused at his own expectations that a cat-like creature must necessarily sound like a cat.

"Of course, sir. The Federation authorities have put us at your disposal."

Kaleb nodded in satisfaction. "Let me start at the beginning, then. Some months ago, the scientists working in our top research laboratory accidentally manufactured a virus. We soon realised that this virus was fatal to our species almost instantly on contact. For some reason the humanoids seem immune.

"Now you must realise, Captain, that although we get on well with the humanoid population, what we had in our laboratory was effectively a time bomb. Sooner or later word of what we had discovered might leak out to the less civilised factions on our planet, and they might try to use the virus against us."

Kirk was curious. "I thought that all racial hatred had long ago ceased on your planet?"

Kaleb smiled. "Of course, Captain; at the moment you are correct. There will always, however, in any society, be those not happy with the system, or even sufficiently mentally unstable to try to use such a despicable method to obtain their own desires. Because of this fear, we decided to destroy all trace of the virus, and all records as to how it had been manufactured.

"At the time, however, we had some Vulcan and Andorian scientists working in our laboratories. Some of them were aware of the virus, and thought it could be developed into a potential cure for the plague now rampant on Sigma Draconis VI. They requested that they might have details of the procedures we had used. Naturally, we could not refuse such a request."

Here the President stopped, and opening the desk took out a computer tape and laid it on the table.

"All the information pertaining to the virus' manufacture is on this tape. There are no copies, and there must be none. You are simply to take this tape under top security to Vulcan, where efforts to eradicate the plague are being co-ordinated, and ensure that it is handed over to the correct authorities.

"I will confess to you that I would be happier if all the knowledge had been destroyed. Perhaps while the Vulcans are researching the virus they will also find a cure, and it will no longer pose such a threat to us."

At this, the conversation seemed to be over. The Captain reached out and took the tape, then handed it to Spock. They agreed that Spock would beam up to the Enterprise and lock the tape securely away, and then rejoin the Captain for the ceremonial dinner. This they did, pleased that the task required of them was so small.

When, at the end of a very pleasant evening, the President suggested that they stay the night, neither of them had any reservations about accepting, and were more than pleased with the rooms that had been allocated to them. It was with a sense of pleasant well-being that both of them finally fell asleep.

Rough hands grasped Spock and pulled him out of bed, and as if through a fog he felt himself being dragged across the room and placed sitting on a chair. Even as his hands were roughly tied behind him his mind was clearing, and he opened his eyes to see that in the dimly lit room there were four humanoid intruders. With a part of his mind he had already identified the faint smell in the air as the remnants of a sedative gas. Obviously his captors had pumped the gas through the ventilation system prior to his capture, thus explaining why he had not been aware of their entry.

As he struggled to regain full control of his senses the connecting door opened and two more humanoids dragged Kirk into the room. The Captain was semi-conscious, obviously also affected by sedative gas, but by the time his hands had been tied behind him in a similar manner to Spock's, he had regained a measure of awareness.

Their eyes locked briefly across the room, Kirk's asking silently if the Vulcan was all right, and Spock inclined his head slightly in acknowledgement.



The humanoids' leader, a young woman barely in her twenties, but with an air of authority strangely coupled with desperation about her, addressed herself to both of them.

"If there was any other way to achieve what we must, then we would do so. But we are desperate, and you can give us the first opportunity we have ever had to obtain a solution to the plight in which we find ourselves."

Kirk raised his head with difficulty, and his reply was guarded. "Forgive us, but we don't understand. Your planet seems happy, the people well cared for and living in mutual harmony. If there is a problem, then you should take it to Starfleet through the proper channels. Abducting or threatening Starfleet Officers is a serious offence."

"A serious offence!" The woman laughed, but her laughter had the ring of tears in it. "Captain, let me tell you the *real* story of this planet."

"Do you not think it strange that two species so different should live so peacefully together? In all your years of travel through space, have you found this to be a common phenomenon? Did you not think it strange, on reading our history, that all signs of racial antagonism seemed to cease abruptly some two hundred years ago, or did you credit us with a sudden, mysterious maturity?"

Kirk was cautious. "We had hoped..." he began, but the woman interrupted furiously.

"Two hundred years ago the Vernax found a way, once and for all, to control the humanoid creatures they so hate and despise. They knew that they would never be admitted to membership of an interstellar federation if they destroyed us, so they found a way to control us effectively.

"As soon as a humanoid child is born, they take the child and implant in its brain two items. The first is a tiny capsule that they can detonate at any time, causing an agonising death. The second is a monitor, through which they can read all that person's thoughts for the whole of its life. In this way, if any of us plan or even think actively about opposing the government, we know the punishment will be a prolonged, painful death.

"But this alone would not give the Vernax effective control. Many a brave person will die rather than be subjected to another's will. So if they detect rebellious thoughts in an individual they not only kill that person, but all of its closely related family. How much harder it is to cause the death of a loved one! In this way, they hope not only to eliminate possible troublemakers, but also to destroy the hereditary characteristics which predispose to rebellion. Their aim over the years has therefore been to breed a race of compliant, unquestioning people.

"Yet nature, it seems, has a way of fighting back, and occasionally favourable mutations occur. Several of our generation have been born with thought patterns that cannot be completely monitored by the Vernax. It is as if a part of our mind functions independently of the rest. This doesn't give us total freedom, as our families still act as hostage for our behaviour; it does mean, however, that we can take some small independent actions without being discovered. Because we are so very few, the Vernax have not yet become aware of this defect in their system of control.



"We here are six such people. For many years we have bided our time, waiting for an opportunity to enable us to strike back at our controllers. I work in the laboratories of the Vernax Research Institute as a cleaner, and when I found out what it was they had discovered, I knew our hopes had been answered. We then devised our plan.

"We concealed our thoughts for long enough to enable us to remove the monitors and capsules from each others' minds. Obviously the Vernax will be aware of this, and as a result they will have killed many of our families. But at least they do not know where we are and what we plan to do. Our families will not have died in vain if we can bring freedom to all of our people.

"You are going to help us. You, Mr. Spock, will remove the tape with the formula of the virus before it is handed over to the Vulcan scientists, copy the information, and return it to us here on Vyrana. We will then have it in our power to destroy the Vernax so swiftly that they cannot harm us, and our species will finally have control over the planet."

Kirk was silent, trying to reconcile the outwardly happy picture of the planet with the nightmarish reality now told them. But he knew already that the destruction of one half of the planet's population was not the solution.

"If what you say is true, then causing more deaths is not the answer. Let us beam you up to our ship, and you can take your case to the highest members of the Federation. They can send trained personnel to enforce an end to this cruelty. You must know that what you're asking my First Officer to do is against his oath to Starfleet, and I would be breaking my oath, too, if I allowed it. We can help you more as your friends than as your prisoners."

For a moment the woman looked as though she might reconsider. Then one of the other humanoids, a wiry man some thirty years old or so, spoke for the first time.

"No, Katina! Have my wife and children died in vain? These men must help us as we planned or all this is for nothing. By the time the Federation sends its negotiators all the capsules in all our peoples' minds could have been triggered. We must destroy the Vernax once and for all, and quickly, and these Federation men are our only method of doing so. The government will not dare attempt a more widespread retaliation while it is still dealing with Starfleet."

The other humanoids chorused in agreement. Silently, they seemed to reach a joint decision. Then the quietest of their captors opened up the bag he had with him and began to assemble what appeared to be a surgical instrument.

Spock felt the stirring of fear in his stomach, and clamped down on it hard. He spoke guardedly. "What is it you intend to do?"

But Kirk had already surmised their intention. He spoke desperately now, pleading. "Katina, please, don't do this! If you use the methods of the Vernax you become no better than they are. Don't you think we're trained to withstand the kind of pressure you're trying to put us under? Our own lives mean nothing to us. You don't seriously think I'll allow my First Officer to betray the Federation and cause the death of hundreds of beings, even if they

are your enemies, just to save my life?"

Katina took the instrument from her associate and moved to stand at Kirk's chair.

"Captain, you will know nothing about it. All memories of this night will be blocked from your mind, and tomorrow you will remember nothing. As you have guessed, once you are sedated we will implant a detonating capsule in your brain, and a thought monitoring device in the brain of the Vulcan. The decision will be solely your First Officer's. We know that over the next few days he will contemplate suicide, and killing you both, and all the other options that each of us has struggled with down the centuries. We are chancing our future on the hope that in the end he will choose life for you both. We will keep the whole affair secret, and Starfleet need never know what he has done. But we will be monitoring his thoughts constantly, and should he try to warn either you or the Federation, we will detonate the capsule in your brain and he will have to live with your death for the rest of his life."

For the first time Spock saw a glimmer of fear in his friend's eyes, not for himself but for the decision he knew the Vulcan would have to make. Ignoring Katina, the Captain turned and looked directly at his First Officer. He spoke quickly, urgently, not knowing how much time was left to them.

"Spock, Starfleet has to know about this. Don't be afraid to do what you have to. Nobody will blame you."

To his astonishment Spock found he could not look Kirk in the eye. He could not believe the suddenness with which a normal diplomatic situation had changed into a nightmare. Already his mind was thinking, analysing possibilities. These people might not have found an escape from their predicament over the years, but surely he, as a Vulcan, would find a way for both of them that did not inevitably lead to death.

Kirk's voice came again, quiet, insistent. "Spock! Promise me."

But again the Vulcan could not find it in himself to reply, and even as the Captain's eyes flashed in anger at the lack of response, the woman pushed the instrument to the base of Kirk's skull, and he slumped unconscious in the chair.

They had made him watch, then, as they carried the Captain back to his bed, and one of their number pressured the small but deadly capsule into the back of Kirk's head.

Finally the woman turned to Spock. "We know the Enterprise is to take the information we need to Vulcan, then return here to Vyrana. When you return you must have the duplicate tape ready for us. Come and stay in the palace again, and we will find you and remove the implants. Both of you will then be free to go. Don't forget that from when you wake every thought will be monitored. If we suspect at any time that you are attempting to hide your thoughts from us, we will detonate the Captain's capsule immediately."

The coldness of the hypo on his neck was the last sensation Spock remembered.

Were it not for the... thing... he had sensed in his brain, Spock would have hoped to dismiss the memories as those of a nightmare. Oh, how he wished that it had indeed all been a dream!

But already the logical Vulcan in him had accepted the situation, knowing that time spent in self-delusion was dangerous, time wasted from trying to find a solution. Still, he found he was shaking as he allowed the door to slide shut and made his way slowly back to sit on his bed.

One thing he knew already. He would not allow Kirk to suffer. The Captain must not be allowed to know what had happened, and if (for a part of him could already see no other solution) his friend had to... die... then Spock would ensure that it was not a painful death.

Anguished, he shook his head in disbelief that he had been forced into a situation where he could even be considering such a thing.

He acknowledged with respect the torment the humanoid population had suffered down the years. And he felt repulsed and violated by the knowledge that even now his thoughts were being read and were not his own.

*You have made a mistake, he thought silently to his tormentors. Together we could have solved the problem. Now we will all suffer, because I cannot do what you ask.*

He didn't quite know at what point his decision had been made, but logically and emotionally there was only one solution.

Suicide was out of the question. Not only would he be abdicating his responsibility, but Kirk would be left alone to face the consequences, and the rebels would doubtless kill him in revenge. Attempting to hide his thoughts would bring about a similar retaliation. He couldn't copy the tape as the rebels had requested, both because of his oath to the service and his honour as a Vulcan. Maybe one day he would derive some small comfort from the fact that Kirk had known and understood that.

Therefore, both for his own sake and for the trust Kirk had placed in him, he would have to report to Starfleet what had happened. If that meant the humanoid rebels would try to make the Captain suffer a prolonged, painful death then Spock would kill him quickly first. It would be the final service he could do for his friend. After that the authorities could do with him as they pleased. With Kirk gone, he could find no interest in any future.

And he would have to do it soon. He didn't believe in himself as an actor, and knew he couldn't go on behaving normally indefinitely. With most people, maybe, but with Kirk? And McCoy? Also, there must be no mind contact between them, whatever the circumstances. He acknowledged regret at this last decision, but knew it to be a necessity. In the intimacy of a meld he could not hope to conceal from Jim all that had taken place.

Coldly, dispassionately, Spock took out his phaser and set it to the highest setting. It must be done quickly, before the rebels could read his thoughts and detonate the capsule, (*and before he could change his mind?* the inner voice whispered treacherously).

Getting up, he started to walk towards the doorway...



... and jumped, startled, as the door slid open and Kirk stood there, smiling, and stretching as if refreshed after a good night's sleep.

"Morning, Spock."

The Captain's smile faded as he sensed immediately the tension in his First Officer, and his face took on an expression of concern.

"Spock! Is anything the matter?"

To his shame, Spock found himself trembling again. With a supreme effort of will he forced his body to relax, and putting his phaser back in his belt he looked up at his Captain and smiled, forcing even his eyes to show affection and warmth.

"It is nothing, Jim. Merely a bad dream."

Their eyes met and held, Spock willing his friend to accept the statement and not probe further. Finally Kirk relaxed and smiled.

"I know what you mean. A strange bed can have that effect." He hesitated, and for a moment Spock feared he would ask again, but Kirk suddenly turned and made for the door.

Spock followed him with something akin to desperation.

The Enterprise sped on its way towards Vulcan. The journey was to take six days, with a brief stop halfway an an unnamed planetoid to pick up some unusual plant specimens requested by the Vulcan scientists.

Spock's despair increased with each passing minute. Never had he been so aware of the two halves of his personality so at war with each other.

*What are you waiting for? the Vulcan would ask logically. Each minute you delay makes the final outcome harder to contemplate. You have reviewed all the options. There is no possible solution. For Jim's sake you must act quickly.*

*But the Human half whispered treacherously, Would it be such a bad thing to do as they ask? If the Vernax have caused such agony to so many people for so many years, do they not deserve to die?*

Such thoughts Spock clamped down on, hard. In such a direction lay certain madness, and now above all other times he had to keep his mind clear.

All the time he was thinking these things he walked a tightrope of normality, knowing that a slip in the direction of either half of his personality would make his friends suspicious and concerned. He could find legitimate reasons to avoid social occasions such as meal times and chess games, but on the bridge he was careful to answer all the Captain's questions with just the right amount of Vulcan correctness, and to allow his eyes to show just the right amount of Human affection when he felt it would be expected. Food also had to be eaten as usual, in case McCoy became concerned for his health and began his usual demands for a physical examination.

And all of this was made much harder because even at night he

could not relax his mental shields for even a second, for fear that some measure of his acute mental distress might somehow get through to Kirk. Although the Captain was not a born telepath, they had both long ago acknowledged the power of the telepathic flow between them.

In this manner, relentlessly, the Enterprise sped towards Vulcan.

"Come in."

McCoy activated the door release, pushed aside the file he was working on, and smiled up at the Captain.

"What can I do for you, Jim? Business or pleasure?"

Kirk smiled in response, but the doctor noticed that the smile seemed rather forced. The Captain sat in the chair opposite the doctor, and hesitated.

"I... just wanted your informal opinion about something, Bones." Again he hesitated. "I wondered if you'd noticed anything unusual in the way Spock's been behaving." He watched the doctor closely, and noted the genuine surprise on McCoy's face.

"Spock?" The doctor smiled. "I thought he was going through one of his better phases. No arguing, concentrating on his scientific duties, and being quite mellow at times - for a Vulcan," he added hastily.

Kirk was quiet. Then, "So you have noticed a change?"

McCoy was puzzled. "Jim, everyone's entitled to a change of mood. If anything he's been acting slightly happier than usual. I certainly see nothing to be concerned about. Why? What is it you've noticed?"

"Bones, that morning on Vyrana, for a second or two he seemed..." The Captain stopped, thinking back to that moment. If he had been more extravagant in his use of words, he would have said that his friend had looked desperate, trapped. But since then there had been no further signs of distress, no obvious cause for such an expression.

"He seemed... upset," he finished lamely.

"Well, perhaps he'd had a bad night?" suggested McCoy.

"That's what he said." It was obvious to Kirk that the conversation was leading nowhere. If the doctor hadn't noticed anything, perhaps his imagination was being overactive.

"Okay, Bones, I'll stop worrying. Maybe I am looking for problems where there aren't any. Thanks, anyway."

Getting up, he left the room, unable to explain to the doctor that it felt as if Spock's mind was somehow closed to him. Perhaps they were all just overtired and needed a few hours rest. There seemed to be no other explanation. With that thought in mind he began to look forward to their planet stopover the following day.

The planetoid they had been requested to visit was almost halfway between Vyrana and Vulcan. Being one of the vast number of charted, uninhabited bodies in the known universe it was unnamed, and had only an extremely lengthy catalogue number by which it could be identified. It had narrowly missed being designated Class M, as although it had an atmosphere tolerable by humanoid species, there was an abnormal amount of volcanic activity, making it too dangerous a place to colonise. McCoy, who had a fondness for allocating names to unnamed objects, had promptly nicknamed it Vesuvius.

The planetoid would probably have remained unimportant, were it not for the fact that several trading ships had made stops there, either for rest or emergency reasons. Their crews had reported strange growths deep within the labyrinth of caves beneath the surface.

The growths, which the traders had been unable to classify as either plant or animal, thrived on the strange radiations within the tunnels, and were reported to possess outstanding medical properties.

Eventually these reports had come to the attention of a group of scientists on Vulcan, and these, hearing that the Enterprise was passing that way, had asked Starfleet if an extra stop could be made. The Enterprise was thus to collect some samples and take them to Vulcan, where they could be properly evaluated.

It looked to be a routine stop. Although volcanically active there were large areas of stability, and the Enterprise assumed a geo-stationary orbit above an area where seismic activity seemed minimal. McCoy would go down with a small medical and security team and hoped to have the necessary samples within a few hours.

The one slight difficulty in their plan arose when it was discovered that the radiation in the subsurface caves disrupted communication and transporter beams. The landing party would therefore have to leave security guards at the entrance to the caves, and make their way through the tunnels until they located the growths, taking care to mark their trail behind them. The tunnels were very extensive, and once inside they would be unable to communicate with either the surface or the Enterprise.

Kirk was initially apprehensive about such a procedure. However, McCoy assured him that with Security going along, the small medical team would be well protected, and it was not expected that they would have to go very far underground before locating the necessary samples.

The Captain was slightly surprised that Spock had not requested to accompany the landing party. Usually the Vulcan's scientific curiosity would not miss such an opportunity. Spock insisted, however, that he had some important research to finish in the laboratories, and Kirk did not wish to push the matter. For himself, he was glad of the chance to catch up with some of the ever-present backlog of paperwork.

It was several hours later that Kirk received the summons to go to the bridge. On arrival there he checked all the reports, and soon shared Sulu's and Chekov's alarm at the way in which the sensor readings from the surface had changed. The planetoid was indeed unstable. Where previously there had been little significant activity, readings now showed a rapid increase in the seismic vibrations within the area. There was no danger to the landing



party as yet, but they were not worth risking for the sake of a few biological specimens.

Kirk had found his reason for abandoning the paperwork. Decision made, he gave Mr. Scott the con, and called Spock to the transporter room, the two of them beaming down to the surface. Telling the guards at the cave entrance to prepare for evacuation, they headed for the tunnels to find the landing party.

The radiation in the caves caused the walls to glow with soft light, giving the illusion of warmth and movement, so that the very rocks seemed to pulse and breathe with heat and life. In reality, the atmosphere was dry and cold, Spock finding it the more unpleasant, although not uncomfortably so.

They walked in silence, mesmerised by the play of light on the rock formations. All sensor readings had shown the strange light to be completely harmless to carbon-based life forms. Indeed, it was positively beneficial to the strange growths that McCoy and his team were searching for deeper underground. Even so, there was something eerie and unsettling in the light, and they followed the marked trail with care, neither of them anxious to spend time lost in the labyrinth of tunnels.

So when they came face to face with McCoy in one of the larger openings, neither party knew which was the more startled.

"Bones! What's the matter?" The cathedral-like atmosphere made Kirk automatically lower his voice to a whisper, and he was aware at once that the doctor was without his medikit.

The doctor's face was drawn. "Jim! Spock! What are you doing here? You shouldn't have come. Two of the men have been badly injured, and..."

"Injured?" Kirk was alarmed. "Injured how?"

McCoy shook his head. "I don't know for sure, Jim. They were packing some of the samples we'd collected when a sheet of what I can best describe as static electricity pinned them to the wall, causing quite severe burns. I've left all the drugs I had with the nurse, and I have to get back to the surface to get further supplies and arrange for transportation."

"I'm afraid you'll all have to come back, Bones." Briefly Kirk outlined the sensor readings the ship had been receiving, and what they appeared to indicate.

"Spock, you'd better go back with McCoy and help prepare the team for immediate evacuation. I'll go back to the surface and ready the medical teams to receive you."

They moved to their separate tasks, Spock crossing the cave to join the doctor and Kirk turning to go back the way they had just come. But before he had taken more than a dozen steps a flare of violet light lanced up from the floor and held him for a second or two before flinging him against the far end of the cave, to land with a sickening thud on the floor. The stench of burning flesh filled the enclosed space; Kirk tried to lift himself up, and couldn't.

Without knowing that he moved, Spock crossed the cave and, turning the Captain over, gently supported him, instinctively

lowering all his shields to let the pain flow into him, to prevent his friend from sinking deeper into shock.

For fully a second.

Then, realising what he was doing, his Vulcan half took over, reasserted itself, and slamming back the shields in terror he could see the jolt of the extra pain hit his friend as the help was denied him.

Appalled at his inability to control such an emotional reaction, Spock watched as the doctor hastily examined Kirk. He did not think that McCoy had been aware of the instinctive support he had offered then withdrawn.

McCoy's face was white. He cursed the circumstances that meant that this was one of the few times he had ever found himself without his medikit.

"Spock, stay with him. The burns are quite severe, and I'll have to go back for some help. There's nothing I can do for him until I get some medication."

McCoy made for the cave entrance at a run, and then... something... in the atmosphere between the two men he'd left in the cave, coupled with the conversation he'd had with Kirk the previous night, made him add, "Help him."

Then he was gone.

"Help him."

The words seemed to linger in the air of the cave, and to Spock they were heavy with implication. For a long time now Kirk had never had to ask for Spock's help in time of need. It had always been freely, automatically, given.

The fact that McCoy had felt it necessary to ask for that help for Kirk now meant that somehow, despite all his meticulous attempts at normality, in some small way a change in his behaviour had been detectable.

Spock knelt now and watched his friend, and for once in his life truly did not know what to do. If he denied Kirk the help he could give him through the meld, not only would he have to watch him suffering, but any slight suspicions Kirk and McCoy might have would be magnified, and would result in the inevitable questioning once they were back on board the ship. If, on the other hand, he did open up his mind, he did not think he could prevent Kirk from knowing all that had occurred on Vyrana, and that knowledge would surely prove fatal to them both.

All this flashed through Spock's mind in the briefest second, but as he watched his friend he saw already that it was too late. Kirk was pale and sweating, breathing shallowly and rapidly from shock and pain, but his eyes were lucid. And as their eyes met, Spock could see the dawning of horror in Kirk's eyes as the knowledge of what he had learned in that one, unguarded second of initial contact finally became clear.

Without stopping to think what he was doing, Spock reached over

and rapidly applied his fingers to the nerve centres that would make his Captain unconscious. Then quickly, quickly, because already he could hear footsteps in the tunnel, he placed his fingers on Kirk's face in the meld position and carefully set about erasing the memory of the last few minutes.

Alone in his office later that evening, McCoy finally admitted to himself that he was desperately worried.

Not about the burns sustained by the Captain and the other two crewmembers. They, fortunately, were responding well to treatment. The three patients had been placed under sedation in the regeneration cubicles, and there was every indication that they would be well enough to return to duty before the Enterprise reached Vulcan. The Captain would therefore be able to meet the Vulcan delegation personally at the end of the journey, as had been planned.

If only it was the burns that concerned him! But the medical checks carried out as routine on injured personnel had thrown up something far more... sinister? His mind shied away from the word, but could find no substitute. Appalled at the results, the doctor had repeated all the tests himself, twice, before he finally allowed himself to believe what they appeared to indicate.

There was... something... inside the Captain's brain that had no right to be there. As far as McCoy could tell it was doing no harm. A small capsule, apparently inert, but raising a host of questions as to its purpose - and equally important, its origin.

McCoy's first instinct had been to remove it immediately. Fear of what its attempted removal might do, however, stopped him for the moment. Then automatically he had gone to his office to call Spock, to tell him, ask him, warn him of what was going on. And that was when his worries really started.

As he had made to press the intercom button, he had remembered with absolute clarity the scene in the caves earlier that day. He had returned to the scene of Kirk's accident sooner than expected, having met a team of medical and security personnel in the tunnel. Scott, alarmed at the increasingly violent sensor readouts, had sent an additional team to assist in the evacuation.

They had returned with the doctor, and entered the cave just as Spock was finishing what McCoy had at the time supposed to be a meld to assist in pain control and to promote healing. It did not surprise him, as he had himself indirectly hinted at it to Spock. He had been slightly alarmed that Kirk was unconscious, but at least it had meant he was suffering no pain.

Now McCoy had never claimed to be an expert on mind-melds, but surely it would have been impossible for the Vulcan to be in such close contact with the Captain and not be aware of the capsule's presence? That posed an even trickier question. If Spock already knew, why had he not said anything about it? Was it possible that Kirk and Spock were again acting under secret orders and had some plan of their own? In which case they would not welcome any interference from a third party.

But what if the capsule was dangerous, and someone was using it to control, or hurt, the Captain? Then the safety of the ship was



at stake, and he had a duty to act.

Torn between alternatives, McCoy finally decided that he would have to broach the subject to Spock, and be prepared to take the rebuff if he was interfering in things he shouldn't know about.

Getting up from his desk, he made his way to the door of his office - and stopped, absolutely still, as he saw the Vulcan in sickbay standing next to the Captain's cubicle.

The emotion on the Vulcan's face was terrible to behold. Too late, McCoy realised that he had sat quietly thinking in his office for so long that Spock must have assumed that the room was empty, and that he and Kirk were alone.

McCoy stood frozen, hardly daring to breathe, knowing that Spock would never have let his guard down if he had known he was being observed. Anger, fear, love, all chased themselves across Spock's features, until finally they settled into... determination? Resignation?

Reaching out, the Vulcan rested his hand on Kirk's shoulder in what seemed to McCoy unpleasantly like a gesture of farewell, then turned abruptly and left sickbay.

McCoy finally allowed himself to breathe, and felt sick with fear for his friends. Things were obviously more wrong than he had even imagined. It was imperative now that he talk to Spock, whatever rejection he might receive. He had to know what was going on, and what, if anything, he could do to help.

For Spock, although he was loath to admit it, Kirk's accident had come as something of a relief. For the first time in days he could relax his mental shields, at least when alone, and get some much-needed rest. Also, while the Captain was unconscious in the regeneration field, he would not know or feel what was going on, thus giving Spock a better opportunity to act. He was still undecided as to what form that action should take.

Finally he went to sickbay, drawn there by the need to be alone with Kirk for the first time since the incident on Vyrana, without barriers between them.

Standing in the darkened sickbay, he had looked down at his friend and been almost overwhelmed by the sheer... waste!... of it all. Death had always been a reality, a possibility, for both of them. But not this way! Not in this pointless, unnecessary trap into which both of them had been placed. The grief and anger welled up within him, and he knew that if he had to inform Starfleet of what had occurred, it must be now, while Kirk could not feel any pain. His whole being rebelled against the finality of such an act...

... and somewhere from within his desperation, the germ of an idea was born. Startled, Spock quenched the half-formed thought viciously, suppressing it into the deeper levels of his mind where it would not be monitored.

No sooner had the thought occurred than his decision had been made. Not an answer, but maybe a way out for both of them, a possibility where previously there had been none. What he would

have to do was dangerous to himself, certainly fatal for the Captain if something went wrong. There was, however, no alternative. Briefly he reached out to his friend, needing the physical contact in case this really was the last time. Then, his mind made up, he left sickbay and headed purposefully for the privacy of his cabin.

Carefully and methodically, Spock locked his cabin door, changed into the stark Vulcan meditation robes, and lowered the lights in his room. The dull glow from the flames in the firepot would be sufficient for his purpose. All the time he let his thoughts wander over everyday matters, careful to suppress every part of what he was planning to do. After a few minutes he was ready, and lying down on the bed he assumed the attitude of sleep.

Then slowly, and very, very carefully, he allowed his conscious thoughts to sink into the deepest levels of the Vulcan mind, that few knew existed and which certainly could not be monitored. Gradually, he allowed himself to sink into deep trance, until finally it seemed to him that he was no longer a part of his body, but existed in some other place.

It was a dangerous state to adopt. As a child he had practised it, but only under close supervision. All Vulcans had to have the knowledge of how to free their minds from the body, so that at the moment of death the essence of being, the katra, would not be lost. The danger was that, unsupervised, it might be difficult to return to the normal state. The functions of his body had to be suppressed almost to the point of death, and it was difficult to know the dividing line.

Only in this state, however, could Spock think, unhampered by the fear that his thoughts were being read. As far as the humanoids on Vyrana would know, his brainwaves would only show that he was asleep. And here, in private, a plan might be devised.

In the state of deep trance Spock had become wholly Vulcan, for in the Vulcan levels of mind there was no place for Human emotion. He could thus view the situation logically and dispassionately, and knew then that there had indeed been a possibility all along. Even in trance, he was deeply shamed by the fact that even with Kirk's death a possibility, his thoughts had been so clouded with Human emotion that he had been unable to surmise a possible course of action.

Logically, he himself was unable to act. Kirk could not be involved in any way. The doctor - (with a shock he registered that the doctor was somewhere near, and with the enhanced telepathic ability of the state he was in, ordered McCoy not to interfere) - the doctor might be a help. It was illogical to assume that McCoy had found nothing unusual during his medical examination of the Captain. The fact that he was here now meant that he must already have his suspicions. He could not, however, be approached directly.

But there was one other who might assist. Someone he could contact and warn of impending danger, if not the cause. In his normal state, the Human failing of pride had prevented him from seeing the possibility. Here pride did not exist, and it was illogical to allow a tragedy to occur because of it.

For himself he would never have asked, but this was not for himself.

Having made his decision, he looked to the deepest levels of

his mind, and finally triggered the call for help.

McCoy's anxiety increased on finding the Vulcan's door locked. Without hesitation he keyed in the medical override, knowing that if Spock had considered it necessary to lock his door, he would certainly not answer to the door signal.

The room was dark except for the flickering on the walls from the red flames in the firepot. After a few seconds the doctor's eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he noted the Vulcan lying asleep on the bed. For a moment McCoy's face softened and he relaxed. Perhaps the urgency that had driven him here was unfounded, and Spock was merely exhausted and needed some rest.

He made to turn and leave the room when he became aware of the unnatural stillness of the body on the bed. His heart missed a beat, and crossing the room he pulled out his mediscanner and ran it over the silent figure. The readings justified all his previous anxiety. The Vulcan was as close to death as the doctor had ever seen him, and he also had some foreign object implanted in the back of his head.

Really frightened now, McCoy grabbed his medikit and fumbled desperately in the semi-darkness for a stimulant, not thinking in his panic to raise the lights...

... and heard, or felt, Spock's voice in his mind as clearly as if he had spoken.

*Do not interfere.*

It stopped McCoy as effectively as a handhold, and kneeling beside the sleeping Vulcan, his mind wrestled in indecision.

It would seem that his worst fears were realised, and that for some reason both of his friends were in some kind of serious trouble. If Spock was able to communicate with him telepathically without contact, he must be in some kind of deep Vulcan trance, and it might be dangerous to interfere with it. Whatever was going on affected both Spock and Kirk, and logically (McCoy couldn't even summon up a smile at the word) something must have happened to them both while they were staying on Vyrana. Kirk had been correct in his assumption that something was troubling the Vulcan. Did that mean that only Spock was aware of a danger?

By asking McCoy not to interfere, Spock was also asking the doctor for his trust. Perhaps interference by a third person might put them in even greater danger? If there was one thing McCoy would have staked his life on, it was that Spock would never willingly harm Kirk. But suppose he was acting unwillingly?

Finally, McCoy came to a decision. Although it was technically against regulations he would honour that trust, and not interfere in whatever it was that Spock was trying to do - at least until tomorrow afternoon, when Kirk could be released from sickbay. Then he would have to speak to the Captain, as Kirk had a right to know what was going on.

For now he would do what he could. He would stay with Spock and monitor the trance, for he knew from experience that, unsupervised, such states could be dangerous.



For several hours he sat in the dimness beside the still Vulcan, his anxiety mounting as the night drew on with no sign of life. When, shortly before ship's dawn, the figure on the bed gasped convulsively before resuming a normal breathing and heart rate, McCoy heaved a sigh of relief. Checking Spock over once again with the scanner, and satisfied that the sleep was now a normal one, the doctor finally slipped quietly out of the room.

Later that morning the clamour of the intercom rudely interrupted what little sleep McCoy had managed to snatch.

"Attention. All senior officers report to the hangar deck to receive the Vulcan delegation. Full dress uniform ordered."

*Vulcan delegation?* thought McCoy. *What Vulcan delegation?*

Cursing under his breath the doctor staggered out of bed and struggled into the hated formal outfit, barely taking time to wash and snatch a sip of what the wall dispenser passed off as coffee.

There was no time to visit sickbay. A call to Nurse Chapel confirmed that all the patients were doing fine, but that it would be six to twelve hours at least before the skin regeneration was complete and the Captain could be allowed to regain consciousness.

McCoy realised that Kirk would be furious at having missed the arrival of the Vulcan scientists. He himself was also annoyed, having hoped to speak to Kirk about last night's events before they all got caught up in the round of diplomatic niceties.

What the devil were the Vulcans doing here now, anyway? Couldn't they wait to see the scientific samples until the Enterprise arrived at Vulcan? They were due to achieve orbit in less than twelve hours; by then the Captain would be back in charge, and the two of them would have had a chance to talk.

Walking quickly along the corridor, McCoy admitted to himself that he was not looking forward to seeing Spock. The events of the previous night had left him feeling slightly nauseous as the adrenalin activated by fear and worry worked on his system, and he did not feel up to a confrontation. He needn't have worried, however, for by the time he arrived on the hangar deck the shuttlecraft was already docking, and the First Officer spared McCoy but the briefest of glances before turning to greet the delegation.

The first person off the shuttlecraft was Sarek. As they had not expected the Ambassador to accompany the scientific party, McCoy wondered how Spock would react to the situation.

The doctor watched as father and son gave and returned the Vulcan salute. At least this time Sarek was not ignoring Spock! Although they had long ago reconciled their differences and were now on speaking terms, it was obvious that the two Vulcans were not going to show any outward sign of affection for each other.

"Doctor." McCoy realised that the Ambassador was now giving him the Vulcan salute, and returned it awkwardly.

"Doctor, I am pleased to meet with you again. Perhaps later we might talk?"

Before McCoy could answer the Vulcan party had moved on, and he was free to return to his duties.

Accepting that it would do no-one any good if he allowed himself to become run down, McCoy checked briefly with sickbay, then returned to his cabin, where he forced himself to eat some breakfast. He had scarcely cleared away before the door signal sounded, and as he answered the door slid open and Sarek strode into the room.

At their original meeting some years previously, the doctor had at first found the Ambassador's presence intimidating. Later, the Vulcan's enforced stay in sickbay had allowed their relationship to develop to the point where McCoy now had a great deal of respect, and even a certain liking, for the man who was Spock's father. He still found Sarek a very dominant personality, however, and found himself automatically rising to his feet as the Vulcan came in.

"Ambassador Sarek! How can I help you?"

"Doctor..." The Vulcan hesitated, and McCoy saw that for once he was not sure of himself. "Doctor, I need to talk to you in confidence."

Startled, McCoy indicated that they should both sit down. "Of course. What is it you want to discuss?"

The Ambassador looked down, and the doctor had the impression that he was undecided as to exactly what he should say. Finally he looked up and met McCoy's eyes across the table.

"Doctor, is there anything wrong with my son?"

The question was so unexpected that McCoy felt the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. Was it possible that in one brief moment of greeting Sarek had surmised so much about the current situation?

McCoy answered guardedly. Spock had asked him not to interfere, and he wasn't going to involve a third party without a definite reason, even if the third party was a relation.

"Why do you ask?"

The Ambassador nodded, as if the doctor's question confirmed his suspicions, then he faced McCoy squarely.

"What I am about to tell you must remain between the two of us. I tell you, firstly because you are my son's physician, and secondly, because I know that apart from the Captain, who I understand is indisposed, you are my son's closest friend."

McCoy inclined his head in acknowledgement of the compliment.

The Ambassador continued. "On Vulcan, shortly after a child is born there is a brief ceremony during which it is bonded to both of its parents. When Spock was born my wife and I followed the custom, although both of us knew that the child's telepathic abilities were at that stage an unknown factor.

"My wife obviously could not form a true bond, and Spock was thus deprived of that part of a Vulcan's life. As for myself, I knew the bonding to be true. You must realise that I do not speak

of an active, ever-present link. It is something which one is only aware of in times of deep distress, usually associated with severe illness or death.

"Even through all the years that Spock and I disagreed, I knew the bond to be intact. I never knew if Spock was aware of it, or whether it existed from his side. It is something which is rarely, if ever, spoken of.

"Last night, while working in my study, I became aware that the link between the two of us had been activated. I had no choice but to come to be with my son. I find, however, that there is no sign of any problem. He doesn't speak of the summons, and I begin to wonder if he perhaps he is unaware of what has taken place, and that the triggering has been accidental because of some physical condition."

McCoy listened to this with a growing sense of amazement, and felt an enormous weight lifting off his shoulders. If Spock had indeed summoned his father, he obviously intended, or hoped, that Sarek would be able to help in some way.

Without hesitation he told the Ambassador everything, starting with their visit to Vyrana and ending with his own and the Captain's suspicions. As he finished, for the first time since the previous night he felt hopeful. Surely together the two of them would be able to think of some way out of this incredible situation?

Kirk did not even have to open his eyes to know that something was wrong. The sounds and vibrations of the Enterprise were so much a part of him that he registered their absence instinctively. Casting his mind back, he recalled arriving at the cave entrance on the planetoid, but after that he could remember nothing.

Puzzled by the memory lapse, he finally raised his head and looked around, and recognised at once that he was on Vulcan. Not just on Vulcan, but in the same room in Sarek's house in which he had stayed once or twice in the past.

Thoroughly confused now, he started to get out of bed to summon someone to explain what was going on. At that moment Sarek and McCoy came in, confusing him even further.

Fifteen minutes later he was no longer confused, but very, very worried - and very angry.

The doctor had reported to Spock that the Captain's condition was not improving as expected. Sarek had offered the facilities of the Vulcan specialist hospitals. They had taken the Captain to Vulcan in the shuttlecraft and Spock, as expected, had not made any objection.

Once on Vulcan McCoy had been able to use the advanced surgical equipment there to remove the capsule from the Captain's brain. Both McCoy and Sarek had agreed that, although risky, this had to be their absolute priority. Although at this stage they couldn't know if its removal would affect Spock, they reasoned that it would be more dangerous to leave it until the Captain regained consciousness. Once awake he would be difficult to sedate without

his knowledge, and they had no way of finding out if just his knowing about the capsule could trigger off some kind of reaction.

Once removed, they dared not analyse or examine it, save superficially, in case its destruction might be picked up by whoever had inserted it, and cause a backlash on Spock.

At this stage they didn't know whether Spock's implant was the same or different. From the scans McCoy had run during his vigil at Spock's side, he would guess that it was something different, but it would be difficult to get more information without the First Officer's cooperation, and at this stage neither of them felt it was safe to approach him.

They told Kirk all of this, hoping that he might be able to throw some light on the situation, but the Captain could not remember.

Apart from the fact that something must have happened to Spock and himself while on Vyrana, probably during the night before he had caught his First Officer looking so desperate, they knew nothing. They could guess that someone's intention had been to monitor Spock's movements, holding the Captain as hostage for his behaviour. As to why such an outwardly peaceful planet should be the cause of such a situation, they could not guess.

It was Sarek who finally made the suggestion. "Perhaps, Kirk, if I could join my mind to yours I might remove any mental blocks that have been imposed, and we might be able to discover exactly what the motive for all of this has been."

"Oh no! McCoy was adamant. "The Captain's just recently come out of surgery, and I don't consider him strong enough to cope with a mind-meld."

Strangely enough, Kirk was also reluctant. Not because of any fear for his own safety; he trusted Sarek almost as much as he trusted Spock, and knew that the Vulcan would not push beyond the limit of what he could give. But in the meld it would be impossible to hide the depth of his relationship with Spock. Whereas he himself could tolerate the intrusion, he knew how desperately Spock wanted and needed to appear wholly Vulcan to his own kind. Then he realised that Spock must have foreseen the possibility of such a meld when he had summoned Sarek, therefore it would be wrong of him to have any further reservations.

"No, Doctor, the Ambassador's right. This is the only way we'll find out the whole truth."

McCoy conceded reluctantly. "All right. But I'm staying to monitor the whole procedure. Any sign of discomfort or distress and I'll have to ask you, Ambassador, to terminate the meld."

Sarek nodded vaguely, his eyes already taking on the distant look that they had seen so often in Spock's. The Ambassador moved to stand behind Kirk's bed, and placed his fingers on the Captain's temples. He spoke the age-old words with the tones of a ritual.

"My mind to your mind..."

Kirk's throat constricted as he felt the warm fingers touch his forehead, so similar and yet so different from those of his friend. He forced his mind to relax and not offer any resistance. Already

he felt he was falling backwards in time, and soon he was reliving with fresh horror the night he and Spock had spent on Vyrana.

"Enough!"

Kirk wasn't sure if it was Sarek or McCoy, or even he himself who had spoken. He shook his head to clear it, shaken by the depth of suffering that had been revealed in the meld. Suppressing his rage at what had been done to Spock he listened while the Ambassador outlined to McCoy what he had learned.

Finally Sarek concluded, "I must report this immediately to the highest Federation authorities. We will have to arrange at once for a team of investigators and negotiators to visit Vyrana. Although the Vernax hate and despise the humanoids, I am sure they will not desire war with the Federation, and will cooperate once they realise their crimes have been revealed.

"Now that we know that the implant in Spock's mind is but a monitor and will not harm him, perhaps he could communicate our intentions to the humanoid rebels and forewarn them not to panic."

Kirk nodded. "Very well, Ambassador, I'll leave all the negotiations to you. You'll forgive me if I want to get back to the Enterprise and inform Spock of the situation."

Sarek turned to McCoy. "Perhaps, Doctor, you would be good enough to inform my wife that you are getting ready to leave."

"Of course." McCoy recognised a dismissal when he heard one. "I'll thank her for her hospitality. Hopefully, Spock will soon be in a position to beam down himself and see her."

As the door closed behind the doctor Sarek turned once again to Kirk. There was a moment's awkward silence between them. Finally Sarek spoke.

"Kirk, I know you are afraid that I will think less of my son because of the knowledge I have gained from the meld. Believe me when I say Spock is his own harshest critic.

"Who is to say what it is to be truly Vulcan? I myself have been considered suspect by some of my peers because of my illogical caring for a Human wife. Yet in today's intergalactic atmosphere it is I who have been chosen as Ambassador of my people, and if my race does not adapt to new ideas it will stagnate as others have before it.

"Perhaps you will tell Spock that although I do not fully understand him, I do not judge him. I consider him fortunate to be able to call you friend.

"Now if you will excuse me while I make the necessary diplomatic arrangements..."

And turning he left the room, leaving the Captain deeply touched by the Ambassador's confidence.

On the Enterprise Spock was once again 'asleep' in his room. But this time it had taken too long and been much too hard. From within the state of trance Spock knew that it had been foolhardy and



illogical to attempt such a state for the second consecutive night. It had taken him nearly half an hour to attain the correct degree of body control, and yet there was no logical alternative. He might be a Vulcan and have Vulcan control, but the effort of schooling his thoughts into perfect normality hour after hour was draining and dangerously wearisome.

He had almost betrayed himself when he had seen his father exit the shuttlecraft. He was grateful that McCoy had arrived in time to provide a suitable distraction.

Many times during the years that he had been estranged from his father he had secretly wondered if Sarek had come to so dislike his son that he had severed the parental bond. There was no way of knowing, as it only made itself known when activated. He was immensely relieved, and, he admitted, grateful, that his father had not chosen to literally cut him off.

Now he had done all that he safely could. Sarek and McCoy had taken Kirk away and hopefully would work out a solution. But why was it taking so long? It had been several hours, and no message of any sort had been received. Tomorrow they would run out of time. Already the Vulcan scientists were asking about their stay on Vyrana, and tomorrow he would have no choice but to give them the tape they needed. He knew that he would give it to them uncopied.

Resisting the urge to reach out just once more to Kirk's mind, he slowly began the perilous journey back to normal sleep.

Alone at last, Kirk could finally allow the white-hot anger within him to come to the surface. He could feel pity for the humanoids in their desperate situation, but he knew that it would be a long, long time before he forgave them for the anguish and misery they had caused. For now, he needed at once to tell Spock that things were all right, to spare his friend any further anxiety.

Signalling the ship, he asked to be put through to Spock's quarters. Although it was late at night he had no illusion that the Vulcan would be asleep.

There was a long delay, and for a moment fear knotted his stomach. Dear god! Surely Spock had not attempted trance again? McCoy had told him of the dangers of such a deep meditative state, especially when unsupervised.

Just as he was beginning to panic, Spock answered. There was an immense weariness in his voice.

"Spock here."

What was Kirk to answer? There were no words that could adequately describe the depths of his distress. He was painfully aware of the fact that although this time things had worked out, one day they would not be able to pull the proverbial rabbit out of the hat, and there would be no happy ending.

Finally, he fell back on practicalities.

"It's Jim. It's over, and I'm safe. I know all about it. I'll be with you in a few minutes, and we'll talk."

He didn't expect an answer, and didn't get one. Switching channels, he prepared to beam home to the Enterprise.

## PARADISE TAKEN

I'm sorry.  
I really am.  
But I had to have you back  
At my side.  
We both know that's where you belong.  
Your happiness was brief,  
A temporary thing,  
But even so, I'm sorry it's gone.  
In my clumsy way  
I saw only one way out,  
And that was with your help,  
So I destroyed your chance of love.

I'm sorry.  
Somehow my feeble apology  
Does not make up for what  
I have taken from you.  
Your paradise is lost  
To you now,  
And perhaps what hurts the most  
Is that I was not  
Receptive to the spores,  
That I could not give that much,  
And I will never know  
The magic you found.  
Please believe me, though,  
It was not because  
Of that that I  
Robbed you of what you had.  
How could I stand by and watch  
My ship being destroyed before my eyes,  
You taken from me,  
The people I know gone?  
You know my first duty had to be here.  
I had to fight, destroy love with anger.  
I had to hurt you.  
Those few hours on an empty ship  
Completely alone, nearly destroyed me.  
To give you such anger and pain  
Was the only way. You were my hope.  
Spock, Leila will never forgive me -  
I pray that someday you do.

Elaine Leeke

# THE FIRST TIME

Only six more minutes to wait.

I never knew that a minute could last such a long time.  
Only sixty seconds, the same as every other minute; but when you're waiting for the rest of your life to start - 360 seconds can stretch to the edges of eternity.

Only five minutes now.

I still can't quite believe how lucky I've been.

I mean, I've made it!

The Enterprise.

Think about it - THE ENTERPRISE!

The stories that simply saying the name recall to mind.

It's got an honour roll all of its own.

Starts way back with the original Captain, Robert April, who took a new Starship out of the yards and started the creation of a whole legend.

Then there was Christopher Pike, who wrote a few (!) tales for himself in the annals of Federation history. (And I still don't believe some of those stories, no matter that they are in the Captain's Log.)

And now -

And now I've only got three minutes left to wait!

I missed the four minute mark completely.

Too busy daydreaming.

I mustn't do that on the Bridge.

I guess I should make a move.

It would never do to be late.

I've just got to stop shaking.

I know that I'm ready for this.

I've trained so hard,  
worked when other played,  
just to get a chance at a chance like this.

I won't foul this up.

This is my big moment.

How I handle this will be noted and commented on.

It's just a test of temperament really.

Two minutes to go.

Where's the turbo-lift disappeared to?

I do know the drills; I do know the equipment.

I know exactly what I've got to do.

At least I've got the lift to myself.

My hair is tidy, my uniform is clean, my boots are clean.  
All the fastenings are secure. (I've checked three times.)

One minute!

Why is the lift moving so slowly?

At last. The doors are opening.

Face the door.  
Smile.  
Look confident.  
Walk forward.

(Ignore the fact that all the butterflies in your stomach have started to crash-land.)

Now down the steps into the command well.

(Carefully now. Don't trip. You've walked down these steps a thousand times in your dreams; you know how. Keep your head up.)

Stop by the centre seat.

Take a breath.  
(Not too deep.)

(Please, if there is anyone out there listening,  
please, please don't let me squeak!)

Time.

Ensign Chekov reporting for duty, sair!

Carry on, Ensign.

Yes, sair!

(I think I'm going to like it here.)

Brenda Kelsey



## THREE INTO TWO

You are by his side  
Because you choose to be.  
He is your other half,  
Your twin, your soul.  
If you're apart  
You're somehow incomplete,  
And nothing matters  
Till you're once more whole.  
So how, then,  
Can I fit into your life?  
How can there ever be  
A place for me?  
The only thing that binds us,  
This one man -  
But what you give to him  
You will not offer me.

Sheryl Peterson



# THE HERBS OF ARA'COGA

by

Jan Davis

The Enterprise was enjoying extended shore leave on Starbase 8 while they waited for Ambassador Clarkson, whom they were to escort to his next assignment. Captain Kirk received an urgent message to go to the Commodore's office; Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy, with Rider Yen, were to accompany him.

Commodore Stevens greeted them as they arrived. "Please be seated. I have just received an urgent call. Starbase 21 has a mysterious illness sweeping through its decks. The nearest recorded symptoms that match were those found in your field report, Rider Yen, of your survey of Ara'coga and its people. You are being sent there to find the antidote."

"Commodore, taking Rider Yen to Ara'coga will take us light years out of our way."

"100.514, to be precise," Spock informed them.

"Not to mention dropping the antidote off at Starbase 21," Kirk continued.

"Let me continue. Starfleet has already dealt with the problem. Rider Yen's knowledge of Ara'coga makes her one of the few people suitable. Rider Keating is at present commanding an expedition on the other side of the quadrant."

"And therefore it would take him far too long to reach Ara'coga. I assume time is of the essence?" Kirk finished.

"As in many such cases," Commodore Stevens agreed. "The scout-class vessel Regalia has been assigned to take Rider Yen, plus a member of your medical staff, to Ara'coga. Approximately two weeks later you will collect them and proceed to Starbase 21."

"What about the poor victims?" asked McCoy.

"Everyone involved has been quarantined, even the staff dealing with them. So far no-one has died. The first case appears to be that of a so-called space trader. At present Starfleet is still tracing his route and contacts."

"So you want Rider Yen and a member of my crew to go and find a possible cure on Ara'coga?"

"Correct, Captain."

"Commodore, what are the symptoms?" Tricia asked.

He handed her a data sheet, which she studied thoughtfully for a moment. "It sounds like the illness Rider Keating went down with. Mother Tega gave me a herbal extract to treat him with."



"Now Commodore, what sort of quack doctor does Starfleet think I am that they expect me to go hunting for some elusive elixir?"

"Oh Doctor, I don't think of you as a quack any more - not since E'Too's birth."

"I suppose that's one excuse for having that four legged terror running loose on board," McCoy grumbled.

The Commodore looked on, puzzled, as Captain Kirk and Tricia chuckled at the remark.

"Captain, you are to choose a suitable person from your crew for this mission."

"Thank goodness for that," McCoy muttered. "You can strike me off that list."

"Okay. Who would you suggest?"

"As I said, it's a herbal extract," Tricia commented. "A botanist with enough knowledge could be useful. We can gather the plants required and keep them in an environment tank, which means we will be able to produce the medicine from fresh stock."

"And grow more if it's needed," McCoy added, liking the idea.

"That would be a logical course," Spock remarked.

"Gentlemen, you have six hours before the Regalia leaves. Rider Yen, Starfleet has given permission for you to take horses with you if you require them."

"Rider Yen, who would you recommend?" Kirk asked.

"I hear that Mr. Sulu is a keen botanist," Tricia began. "And Captain, during this extended shore leave he has been taking riding lessons from me, so he is already acquainted with Sasha."

"I'll contact Mr. Sulu and see if he's willing to assist you."

"And you'll also be wanting Brutus," Commodore Stevens smiled. "I've heard a rumour about some Klingons receiving rough treatment from that stallion."

"Thank you for your assistance, sir. If you will excuse me, I've some packing to do."

"By all means, Rider Yen."

Mr. Sulu was waiting for her in the transporter room. "What will I need?"

"Oh, some small portable environmental botany tanks - about five," she replied teasingly.

"I mean personally."

"Your riding clothes and boots, plus a few changes. I'll deal with the other supplies that we'll need. Meet me at the stables in an hour."

"I'll be there," Sulu promised.

"See you there," Tricia said before heading for her cabin.

She quickly gathered her equipment and had it sent to the Regalia before making her way to the stables. One of the attendants greeted her.

"Everything is ready for you, including Brutus and Sasha."

"Has sufficient food and bedding been sent to the Regalia?"

"It's on its way, ma'am."

"Thank you. Hello, Brutus - are you ready to do some real work?" she fussed him as he searched her pockets for titbits.

"Tricia?"

"In here, Sulu."

He appeared at the half door. "Who have I got?"

"Sasha. You know where to find her. Are you prepared?"

"Think so," he replied as he vanished.

Tricia chuckled to herself as she heard him greet the mare as she saddled Brutus. She led him into the yard; Sulu followed with Sasha.

"Mount up, and we'll make tracks to the Regalia."

They were soon at the docking tunnel for the Regalia. Anti-grav trolleys loaded with hay, straw and sacks of feed lined the docking area. A group of security men were standing across the tunnel's entrance. Tricia pulled up in front of them.

"You're not coming on board, Rider," the leader told them.

"On whose orders?"

"The Captain's, ma'am."

"Is he aware that Starfleet has arranged this?" she pressed as she held Brutus with a firm hand.

"It's not you he objects to, its the horses."

"Mr. Sulu, hold Brutus for me," she said as she leapt down and threw him the reins. "I'm off to see this Captain. We only have four hours to get this lot loaded."

She approached the stable boy who was watching over the trolleys. He nodded at what Tricia said and left.

"Mr. Sulu, the reins, please." He returned them, and Tricia led Brutus over to the Human barrier. "Would you kindly hold Brutus for me while I pay my respects to your Captain," she asked the leader sweetly.

"Brutus?" the man asked. "Not the Brutus who harassed those Klingons?"

"The same," Tricia replied as she pushed past them. "He'll only bite you if he doesn't like you."

Sulu sat enjoying Tricia's prank for the ten minutes she was gone. When she returned she collected Brutus's reins from the security man and walked over to Sulu.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"Captain Manerin has refused to take Brutus and Sasha to Ara'coga," she answered.

"So what happens now?"

"We're waiting for reinforcements," she smiled, "and they should be here any minute. In fact, here they come."

"Rider Yen, what's the hold up? Why has all this not been taken aboard the Regalia? What are you waiting for?" Commodore Stevens greeted her.

"A small hiccup, sir. I hope that your presence might speed things up."

"Problems already, Yen, Sulu?" Kirk asked.

"Yes, sir. A slight misunderstanding," Tricia replied. "I'm sure the Commodore will solve it."

The Commodore smiled. "Just leave it to me. High Command issued the orders and Captain Manerin will be in deep trouble if he refuses." He approached the Regalia, and the security men snapped to attention as he passed.

Tricia leaned back against one of the trolleys with Brutus nuzzling her, seeking any further titbits she might have stashed in a pocket. It was not long before angry voices could be heard coming down the tunnel.

"I will not have them. I've not enough room for two horses plus their supplies," Captain Manerin protested.

"Captain, you have sufficient room, else Starfleet would not have assigned you to this mission," Commodore Stevens pressed.

"But a stallion and a mare sharing the same quarters?"

"The consequences are my responsibility," Tricia stated.

"So, Captain, I don't see the problem. Your departure has been delayed by an hour so that you can get all this loaded. Rider Yen, if you have any more problems while you are in my jurisdiction..."

"Thank you, sir," she replied.

Two hours later Tricia and Sulu explored their quarters as the Regalia left the Starbase bound for Ara'coga.

Captain Sirapoc snarled into his intercom at his First Officer. "Have those miserable worms received their deserved punishment?"

"It is as you command," the man replied.

"Captain, sir, I have decoded that Federation transmission to the Starbase."

"Very good," Sirapoc smiled. "And what does Starfleet wish us not to know?"

"That there is an important item to be found on a planet called Ara'coga, and that SHE who shamed our crew is to go there to seek it."

"We too must go and seek this treasure, and shall wreak our revenge upon Rider Yen also."

"Rider Yen, there's a personal call for you," the communications officer buzzed her intercom.

"Thank you. Put it through, please."

"Greetings, and how is my favourite Rider?" a familiar face beamed at her from the small screen. "Here, you've a cushy job."

"Oh Carl, it's good to hear from you. What do you mean, cushy job? On board the Enterprise? You've got to be joking! I've had a few run ins with Klingons."

"Plus hand rearing a foal, I hear. Dad's wondering when you're sending her into his care."

"Your father is very possessive about my horses."

"He likes to know that we have the best," Carl replied. "Hear you're going to Ara'coga."

"Yeah. Want to give Father Veluga a message?"

"Just tell him to take good care of you."

"Would you expect him to do less?"

"No. Who's going with you?"

"Mr. Sulu, ship's helmsman cum botanist on the Enterprise; and Brutus and Sasha."

"You'll be fine, kid. Good luck." With that he signed off.

Later Tricia joined Sulu in the Regalia's mess room. "How are Brutus and Sasha?" he asked.

"Fine. A little restless. There's nowhere I can exercise them. Once round the main corridor isn't sufficient."

"Never mind," he said, smiling. (They had had this conversation every day for the last week.) "We'll be arriving at Ara'coga in a few days."

"Thank goodness for that," Tricia answered. "Carl Keating just called. I think he's a little envious that I'm going back there."

"Sounds like you and Rider Keating get on very well."

"We're like cousins."

"Cousins? Don't you have any real family?"

"Not that I know of," she replied, her mind turning back the years. "Mother died when I was eight. Father was commanding a routine patrol ship between outposts. He had gradually worked his way up the ranks. I was sent to a boarding school for the children of Starfleet personnel in Oregon. I hated it."

"Any grandparents?"

"Don't know. Dad lost touch with them years ago. Neither side liked the match, I guess."

"How did you spend the holidays?"

"I was virtually left to my own devices. The number of escapades I got myself into! Got myself trapped down an old gold-digger's mine shaft the third time I ran away. I had camped on this hillside, and the shaft suddenly collapsed under me."

"How did they get you out?"

"There was this Rider sent out to find me. He heard my calls for help and got a rescue team to me. I spent the rest of that holiday with one leg in plaster."

"A bit old-fashioned, wasn't it?" Sulu laughed.

"Oh," she chuckled, "they arranged it on purpose, knowing it would keep me put. The following summer I was off again. I was eleven that year. I covered around fifty miles on foot in three days, dodging out of sight whenever I heard anything coming, and camped as the light faded. I'd found an old survival tent in an attic at the school - made me more independent. On the third night I found this large ranch with buildings scattered all over the grounds. I felt there would be somewhere for me to doss down for the night, and found an empty hut. I stayed the night, only I must have been really tired because I overslept. The first thing I can recall were voices, just before I was discovered. They were going to prepare the hut for a mare and her foal. Uncle Len, as I now call him, recognised me from a news bulletin. He took me up to the house and gave me a good breakfast before contacting the school. I spent the rest of the holiday there. It's one of the ranches that breeds horses for the Riders."

"So that's how you met Rider Keating."

"He went to the Academy the next year," Tricia explained. "Uncle Len arranged for me to spend my holidays on the farm."

"And they let you?"

"Sure. I think they felt it was better than me continuing to run away and finding more four hundred year old mine shafts. Brutus was born during one of my holidays, and Uncle Len gave him to me. I suppose mixing with the Riders influenced me; when I left school I followed Carl. They also taught me how to handle situations."

"Yeah," Sulu remarked. "It was round the ship in no time that



you'd had a confrontation with the Captain within two minutes of arriving, and he had backed down. We all wondered what we'd got."

"I was a bit annoyed at being posted to the Enterprise, where I felt I'd be of little use."

"Now you're one of the crew, and you'll soon be returning to Ara'coga."

"I think E'Too helped me to settle in."

They spent the next few days reminiscing over their childhoods. Sulu probed Tricia for a more personal view of Ara'coga than her bland report, and she was only too glad to brief him.

"The people of Ara'coga are split into three groups. There are numerous villages and hamlets belonging to each group. The water valley people live on the shores of the oceans or the great lakes; they are fisher folk, mainly. The lower valley people are the crop growers; the lush valleys they inhabit produce bountiful crops and rich pickings from wild woodlands and groves. Finally there are the high valley people, who are the herders and hunters. They herd a number of animals similar to our domestic stock. They usually hunt the wild animals that prey on their herds. This is sounding like a lecture."

"Go on, I'm enjoying it. Who is this Father Veluga?"

"Father Veluga is of the low valleys. His tribe made Carl and me welcome; we stayed there for much of our time with the Ara'cogans. If we went off for a few days he would provide us with a guide. His son Lorvan set his eyes upon me as a suitable woman for his hut; Father Veluga made me his recognised daughter to protect me from him."

"What of the Prime Directive?"

"When we first went to Ara'coga it was to investigate an amazing archaeological site unveiled by a seismic upheaval on the north continent, which is uninhabited. What Carl and I found was a ruined city like Pompeii. It was eerie, a whole city of a society developed as far as the Greek and Roman empires back home. It was all wiped out in a volcanic explosion a millennium before we found it - we age tested a rock sample. We had been granted the use of our horses because the city was scattered over a wide area of the volcanic range. The people had used the natural heat for their cooking and home heating. We found huge communal ovens built into the mountain sides. One still contained the petrified remnants of their bread."

"One day we returned to the bay area, where we had set up our camp, after spending a week exploring one of the highest parts of the city, mainly to get fresh supplies and to record our findings. A boat had drawn up at the quay and its occupants were investigating the equipment we had left in our main camp. We rode down the main street towards them; luckily we had both opted for buckskins instead of our uniforms, and had our Starfleet equipment with us. The leader of the group greeted us as people of the city they call Afar. The universal translator enabled us to understand them. We were able to probe them gently, finding out what they knew of the dead city. Their tales had been handed down through the

generations, and on the way - like our tales of Robin Hood - had become mixed in with other tales. From what they told us, Afar was a city of heroes and learned men. Its traders had plied the seas in ships with huge white sails, plundering its riches. Then a final tale, that of a month of red skies and a lone boat found drifting, whose occupants, except one, had died of a terrible plague. The survivor prophesied that there would be a bright light in the sky before the people of Afar would come again."

"Wow!" gasped Sulu. "So you used the prophecy as a disguise."

"With Starfleet's permission. Father Veluga was the leader, and he made us welcome to his village. We were able, while we were there, to study the Ara'cogans in detail, though we were careful not to influence them."

"And during that time Rider Keating went down with the dreaded bug?"

"Correct. I wonder how that space trader contracted it?"

"Maybe your Father Veluga could enlighten us."

The Regalia slowly orbited Ara'coga. The small transport shuttle waited in the bay while the landing site became shrouded in night.

The shuttle landed, quickly unloaded, and departed. Tricia and Sulu set up a temporary camp and waited for dawn to arrive. As the first fingers of light reached across the sky figures appeared on the hillside. Tricia rose and stretched. She collected her grooming brushes from the tackbag and began to groom the two horses.

"Mr. Sulu, we have about an hour before they get here, so while I pack up camp can you cook us breakfast?"

"Sure. It'll be half burnt."

"Naturally - that's half the fun of cooking alfresco," she called from the far side of Brutus. "Up," she instructed, grasping the horse's leg. He obeyed and she checked his foot, then progressed to Sasha.

"Breakfast is ready," Sulu called.

They tucked into half burnt half raw bacon, potato cakes and black coffee. Tricia had just reached for the pot to pour herself a fresh cup as the travellers arrived.

"Greetings, Sister from Afar," one of the men greeted her from the back of his shaggy mount. "We saw the star last night that tells of your coming."

Greetings, Brother of the low valleys," Tricia returned, replacing the pot before she burned her hand.

"You bring a stranger to our lands."

"Meet Sulu, also of Afar."

"Sulu of Afar, as you come with Tricia, welcome to the low

valleys. Sister, when you are ready we shall return to the village. Our father awaits you."

"Have you eaten?"

"Before the light streaked across the sky," he answered.

"Then we leave shortly," Tricia stated as she kicked dust onto the camp fire while Sulu saddled Sasha. Their equipment was loaded onto the spare pack animals that Lorvan had brought.

"I see, Sister, that you have brought your riding beast," he stated as he watched her saddle Brutus.

"Careful, don't come too close - remember, he bites," she warned teasingly as she leapt into the saddle.

Lorvan led the party back up the road to the village. By the time they arrived the villagers were already attending to their daily work in the surrounding fields and woodland. The smell of baking bread wafted to them from the communal bakehouse. A man unloading fuel logs from a pack animal called to them, "Greetings, Tricia of Afar." Tricia waved her answer as they passed.

The group pulled up beside a corral set in the village centre. Tricia and Sulu placed their horses in the smaller pen as their escort released theirs into the larger one.

"Come, our father awaits," Lorvan stated.

Tricia fell in behind him with Sulu at her side, his tricorder hidden in a handwoven bag over his shoulder. Their buckskins merged well with the native apparel.

Father Veluga sat before his house, with the children of the village not old enough to lend a hand in the community gathered before him.

"Father, I have brought her," Lorvan announced.

"Tricia, my daughter from Afar, greetings," the man beamed. "Children, you are excused your learning for today."

The children cheered and besieged Tricia, having heard stories of the two from Afar. Finally, they were alone.

"Daughter, you bring a new companion with you. Is Carl from Afar not well?"

"Carl is fine, Father, and sends you his greetings. He has other tasks at present, else he would have come with me. Meet Sulu, also of Afar."

"You are welcome to my village, Sulu of Afar, and all the hospitality of my house is yours."

"You do a stranger proud, sir," Sulu replied.

"And you, my daughter, have become a woman during the seasons since your last visit."

Tricia smiled at the compliment. "And you, Father, have grown a few hairs of age."

"It comes to us all, child; even you will get some as the seasons pass."

"Not for a number of seasons yet, Father."

"My daughter, why have you not visited us before when your star has crossed the night sky?"

"Last night was the first time I have been here since I came with Carl."

Veluga caught her puzzled tone. "Let us, Tricia and Sulu from Afar, go to the rock of our valley watch." He caught Tricia's hesitation. "Lorvan will place your things in the safety of my home."

The climb up to the valley watch was a narrow twisting path. They reached the rock as the day approached the middle hour. The watch was a large square rock set against one of the valley's walls. They dismounted and tied their mounts to a rail set at the side of the path.

"Here, daughter from the stars, we are able to talk freely," Veluga said as he squatted down beside the cold fire pit and lit a small fire. "Now, Tricia, you can ask me those questions that were in your eyes when I asked you earlier why you had not come before."

"Father, because of a thing called the Prime Directive, access to this land and its people is restricted to myself and Carl. We, though, are still bound by the Prime Directive and must seek permission to come here. Carl is at present leading a research team elsewhere."

"So your people sent you to us."

"Yes, Father, because our people need your help."

"Go on, child."

"A community of our people has fallen sick with an illness our healers do not recognise. The nearest they have matched it to is the record of Carl's sickness in my field report."

"And you have come to seek that remedy."

"Yes, sir; the plants and the recipe," Sulu added.

Veluga nodded. "Tell me, how did this illness from my lands reach your community among the stars?"

"That, Father, we would also like to know. You asked me earlier why I had not come before; when was the last time that you saw the star that tells of my coming?"

"At the close of the last season."

"And we are at present?"

"In the second passage of the night face of this season."

"How long is that?" asked Sulu.

"Five weeks our time," Tricia stated, "and if you're thinking what I am, that trader went straight to Starbase 21 from here."

"But why would he risk the penalties of Federation law by coming?"

"Simple; the ruins of Afar city hold many ancient treasures and artefacts," Tricia answered. "I'd best call the Regalia and allow her to leave."

The Klingon sergeant expressed a sigh of relief and ordered the cloaking device to be deactivated. Another fifteen minutes and their ship's power would have been dangerously drained.

"You!" he barked, enjoying the feel of the power the commander had temporarily given him. "Open a channel to the Captain. Inform him that the Federation vessel has departed, and the Rider and her companion are still upon the planet."

"Good." Captain Sirapoc received the information with satisfaction. He turned to his landing party. "Now, you miserable worms. We shall capture that village below and discover the treasure which Rider Yen seeks, and where she might be found."

The group of Klingons plodded down the steep slope of the gully where the village snuggled into the mountain. The Captain strolled into the village centre and stood by the corral as his men herded the natives from their homes.

A teenager saw the strangers assault his home and ran off in search of help. Most of the men were scattered over the slopes attending to their flocks, or hunting. He found the trail he sought, which led him down to the lower valleys.

Father Veluga and Tricia walked back down the trail side by side, leading their animals as they talked. Sulu followed, studying the flora and fauna.

"The herbs you seek, child, come from the high valley people. They are delicate to handle; a few days after picking they perish, and the medicine with them."

"Father, we have tanks that we can store the plants in, and so keep them in the environment they are used to."

"You can do these things?"

"Mr. Sulu has an interest in plant life; that is why he is here. He knows what to look for, and the questions to ask the person who gathers the herbs."

"Your leaders are wise to send such a person to aid you." He paused; a shout came from above them, and they turned to see a youth scrambling down towards them. "It is Worsa, my nephew of the high valley. I wonder what is wrong that he leaves his flock."

"I'll go and fetch him." Tricia leapt into the saddle and kicked Brutus back up the path to where the boy waited, out of breath. "Greetings, Worsa of the high valley."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Tricia from Afar, your uncle's recognised Daughter." She turned Brutus around. "Use my stirrup and ride behind me."

Worsa obeyed, and they returned to where the two men were waiting.

"Worsa, cousin from the high valley, meet Sulu, also from Afar."

"Why is it, Nephew, that you have left your flock unattended?"

"Strangers, Uncle Veluga, attack our village, herding the women and tinies plus the elders like animals into the village corral."

"What else can you tell me of these strangers?"

"They appeared like magic on the slopes above the village."

"Describe this magic," Tricia pressed.

"As if the stars of the night were scooped together for a breath of time," he complied.

"A transporter beam. But who?" Sulu asked.

"You have this magic?" the boy asked.

"Yes, but I never use it for Brutus and Sasha," Tricia answered. "Father, I feel that these people are not of our community."

He nodded. "That I agree with. Why would they send you if they intended to come with such methods against old folk and women?"

"The strangers frightened our people with weapons that throw bolts of lightning," Worsa added.

"Like this?" Tricia pulled her phaser from her pocket.

"No, bigger."

She fired at a branch of a tree and it dissolved into nothing.

"Yes, it is almost the same," he agreed.

"Tricia, you're giving away our technical secrets."

"Mr. Sulu, if those people are who I think they are, then we are the only ones available to aid the Ara'cogans fight a shipload of Klingons."

"Klingons? What Klingons? We are quite a way from their border."

"How about that so-called trade delegation we met on Starbase 8?"

"The ones you and Brutus made mincemeat of two of their crew?"

"Oh my god - it's me they're after! They must have picked up either Starfleet's communication or Carl's call."



"Sounds plausible," Sulu agreed.

"Quiet now," Father Veluga cautioned. "We are approaching the village. Worsa, speak not of what you have heard Sulu and Tricia from Afar speak of, for the good of our people and for what their people call the Prime Directive."

"My lips are sealed around those facts, Uncle."

"Good, it must be so. My home is open to you," he said as they walked through the village.

As evening fell Veluga gathered the men around his housefire. "It has come to my knowledge that strangers have attacked the high valley village where my nephew Worsa lives."

"And where do these strangers come from? It is noted that your daughter from Afar has returned. Could these strangers have come with her?"

"No," Tricia broke in. "The strangers are not of our people, but from what Worsa has told us they are known to us."

"Where do they come from - under dwellings?"

"Some of our people believe so," she answered as Sulu bowed his head to hide his mirth.

"Then how shall we handle these people?"

"Father, send a man to the nearest water valley village that is on the shore of the water that leads to Afar. Ask them to have a boat ready to take a party of strangers there."

"You have a plan, my daughter?"

"Yes, Father. We need to keep them out of the way until our friends from Afar can help us. I intend to send them to the dead city of the Ancient Ones."

"How, child, will you do this? Worsa spoke earlier of the beam of light by which they travel."

"By word of your Visionary. She shall ban the use of the beam of light, as the Ancient Ones will only allow the success of their mission if they travel by water. Have you still got a Visionary?"

"Alas, no. She found the man of her life shortly after you left, and her bower falls into disrepair," Father Veluga stated.

"Then I shall become her."

"The spirits of the Old Ones will be angry," an Elder warned.

"Would they, even though I do it to protect your people?"

He thought for a moment. "The Ancient Ones are wise; they will help if it is right for you to do this."

"I shall order that the bower be repaired as the new light stripes the skies," Veluga promised.

"And what of me?" Sulu asked. "And our gear?"

"You are the son of a water valley chief, seeking my hand. Our gear can be hidden around the bower. Father, can you arrange for the single girls to leave me a veil?"

"As it should be," the Elder commented. "I shall choose the six who will be your companions. But your appearance - it is too..."

"That I can fix," she smiled. "I shall be called Tri-kega."

"You think it will work?" another asked.

"We can but try," Veluga stated. "Daughter, your animals we shall place in the corral we have in the woods."

After a few more decisions the men left. Tricia dampened and plaited her hair before she went to bed.

The next day Tricia brushed out the plaits and was pleased with the fuzzy style. Mother Tega gave her a plain gown of a heavy woven fabric. Six girls entered the hut and curtsied to her before presenting the cloak of net to which they had already attached veils of various woven designs. Mother Tega was placing a circlet of flowers on her head when another woman entered.

"Tricia from Afar, I know why you do this, and that you prepare yourself in the tradition of our people."

"Sher-ba!" Tricia shrieked with delight at the sight of the ex-Visionary.

Sher-ba placed a veil that she had worn on Tricia's head. "Your maids must pick flowers each morn to entwine this staff."

They set off with Sher-ba instructing Tricia as they headed for the bower.

"The veil must cover your face in the presence of all but your maids. You must raise it and look directly at the person for whom your message is sent. To bless an alliance you remove the girl's veil from your cloak and entwine it with these flowers, and give it to the youth." She lowered her voice as she suggested a couple.

Tricia promised to keep it a secret as they entered the bower. This was a horseshoe shaped clearing with chest-high bushes burdened with flowering creepers. The men had repaired the thatched dwelling and were pulling another flowering creeper over it. A pool to one side of the clearing reflected the sky.

"Tri-kega, your bower awaits you. May your visions bless our people," Father Veluga greeted her. Tricia bowed her head in response. "And your equipment lies hidden under the bushes," he whispered.

"Thank you, Father," she answered. She walked over to the pool and floated a handful of blooms upon its surface as all but her maids left the bower.

"Sher-ba says that your hair looks too fresh if the strangers come," one of the girls commented.

Tricia removed her veil and the girl brushed a mixture of dried

herbs, grasses and petals into her locks before the veil was replaced. As they waited the girls chatted, even though they knew each other from childhood; the six attendants filled the corner of the valley with happy voices.

Captain Sirapoc marched through the settlement to where he had seen its corral. His men were scattered throughout the area gathering the villagers. He hoped that this village would provide him with some clue as to where he might find the elusive Federation woman. The last village had denied all knowledge of such a person, or of any treasure. His men had gone out the following day and had gathered the men of the village. Again he had negative results, until one of his underlings had reported finding a track that appeared to lead out of the valley.

His men had now filled the corral, and he turned to study the group. "Who among you is the leader?"

"Sir, I am." Father Veluga stepped forward.

Sirapoc studied him for a minute. "I seek a stranger who has come to visit you, and the treasure that the stranger also seeks."

"In what form is this treasure?" Veluga asked.

"That we will discover once we have the stranger."

"And this stranger looks like?"

"Silence! I ask the questions. Men, search the women's faces. See if she is among them."

The men pushed their way through the villagers, studying each woman's face before thrusting them aside as they progressed through the crowd.

"Captain, look!" one of the men called, pointing into the village.

Sirapoc turned and watched as a group of seven young women paraded through the town, the leading pair scattering petals before the central figure.

"My daughter Tri-kega. She is our Visionary," Father Veluga informed him. "She will speak only to the person for whom she has a message."

The Captain waved away his men, who were about to set upon the girls. The group approached the Captain, and the Visionary pushed her way through the parade's leaders. Her head was covered by a veil.

"Father," she asked softly, "who among these strangers is their leader?"

"Tri-kega, you stand before him."

The girl turned to the Klingon Captain and lifted her veil. "Forgive me; I had to check that I gave the message to the right person."

"I accept your apology," he said, bowing his head.

"Then study my face, O stranger. Am I not like she whom you seek, so that we could be sisters?"

He nodded his agreement.

"Then hear me and heed my words. She whom you seek travels over the great lake of this land to the dead city of Afar, where only she can find the treasure which you also seek. To succeed in gaining both the treasure and the woman you also must travel upon the surface of the great lake. If you use the beam of light, which the Old Ones say is your form of travel, then you shall surely fail." She lowered the veil, hiding her face once more.

"Explain yourself," Sirapoc demanded.

"I cannot. I have delivered the message that the Old Ones gave me, and return now to my bower." She rejoined her attendants.

"Tri-kega!" a voice called to her from among the villagers as Sulu played his part. Tricia turned to him and shook her veiled head. The party tried to set off, but a couple of Klingons barred their way.

"Let them go," Sirapoc ordered.

The men obeyed and the girls walked out of the village.

"Release the people," Sirapoc ordered. "Save six of the men and keep them here."

"Sir, my house is yours," Veluga offered.

"Thank you." Sirapoc followed him. "Tell me where is this city of Afar?"

"Afar is across the great lake," Veluga answered. "I will lend you a guide to take you down to a village upon its shore after the moonface has passed over us once more."

"Very good," Sirapoc accepted. He flicked open his communicator and ordered the officer on board to scan the planet for a dead city near an expanse of water.

Night came and the Klingon left Veluga's hut with the excuse of needing a stroll before he rested. Taking a party of six the Captain left the village and transported to his ship; in a short time they had arrived at the ruins of Afar.

"Scout around and see what you can discover," he ordered.

"My lord, the light will soon be gone."

"Naturally. See what you can discover of this place. You two, set the alarm beams across the dock, as that witchwoman said the Federation woman is travelling by some water craft. I wish to know when she arrives."

The men hurried off, and returned as the light vanished to where he waited. "Report," he ordered.

"My lord, whatever the treasure is that the Federation seeks, I

am unable to find it."

Sirapoc nodded. "That Visionary said only the woman could find it."

"Sir, the alarms are laid."

"Excellent. We shall return to the village. Before we leave them I intend to pay the Visionary a visit." He opened his communicator and they were transported back to the village.

Sulu slipped from shadow to shadow through the village and into the bower woods. "Tri-kega!" he stage whispered.

"She is here, Sulu-han," one of the girls answered.

Sulu entered the camp and one of the girls patted a place beside her.

"Tricia, they've transported to Afar," he whispered across the circle.

"It was to be expected. I think the Captain will be calling tomorrow," Tricia answered with her head bowed. "In a few days, go to Worsa's village. Worsa's mother is their Healer, so she will be able to help with the herbs. Think you can manage?"

"Looks as if I shall have to," he muttered. "Best be getting back." And with that he faded back into the shadows and returned to the village.

The following morning Captain Sirapoc asked to be guided to Tri-kega's bower. Tricia lounged beside the visionary pool and from time to time scattered a flower head onto it. He stopped beside her, and sensing him, Tricia raised her veiled head.

"You went by the beam of light to the dead city of Afar while the moonface was overhead," she began. "It was so prophesied, and that you would fail. She whom you seek is still upon the great lake. If you follow her by the same means, when you reach Afar she will have found the treasure."

"What is this treasure?"

Tricia shook her head. "That has not been revealed to me. Go to my father, and he will give you a guide to lead you to the village of the fisherfolk of the water valleys."

"Anything more?"

Again Tricia shook her head. "I can tell you no more."

"Then I shall take your advice."

With that he turned and led his men from the bower. As he had promised, Veluga gave them a guide, and they left the village.

Sulu came and collected the environmental tanks. "You'll be staying here?"

"Sure. Safer, I think. Sulu, no communication until the Enterprise gets here."

"Fine. Worsa is helping me. Father Veluga arranged for us to stay in Lorvan's hut last night. We got on like a house on fire."

"Good," Tricia smiled. "Hope to hear that you have been successful before the Klingons return."

"Boy, I'd love to see that Captain's face when he finds out you've fooled him."

"So would I," she agreed.

"See you. Worsa wishes to be home before dark." He turned to leave. "How are Brutus and Sasha?"

"Restless, don't like being cooped up, but are great. I check on them regularly," she laughed. "Now off you go."

The Enterprise entered orbit around Ara'coga.

"Prepare to contact the landing party," Kirk ordered.

"Captain, hold that order," Mr. Spock called. "We have company."

"What?"

"I am picking up traces of a Klingon Bird of Prey."

"Battle stations!" Kirk ordered, punching the red alert button.

"Captain, there!" Chekov pointed to the forward screen.

"Mr. Spock?"

"Confirmed, Captain."

"Lock phasers on target."

"Phasers locked on."

The Bird of Prey shimmered into view and fired its weapons. Kirk ordered return of fire, and a bolt rocked the Klingon vessel.

"Captain," Mr. Spock said from his console, "their defence shields are severely weakened. It would appear we have the upper hand."

"We are twelve hours overdue."

"And if they've been shielding since our expected time of arrival, that would account for their weakness," the Vulcan stated.

"Mr. Chekov, continue bombarding their shields."

"What about Rider Yen and Sulu?" McCoy asked, arriving on the

bridge.

"We have not yet contacted them. The shuttle is ready to leave to collect them and the horses once we have dealt with these Klingons."

"Is there room for an extra passenger?"

"A medical officer is required," Spock said.

"Good. I'll go and get my things." With that the doctor left the bridge.

"Captain, the Klingons have requested a truce," a surprised Uhura informed Kirk. "They wish to surrender."

"Inform them to stand by for a boarding party," Kirk ordered. "Mr. Spock, shall we proceed to the shuttle bay?"

"Captain, Lt. Sharpa calling from the Bird of Prey. He has some news for you," Uhura cut in.

"Let's have it." Kirk returned to his chair. "Yes, Lt. Sharpa?"

"Sir, we only have one third of our crew here on board."

"What?" Kirk exclaimed in surprise.

"The rest are treasure hunting in the dead city. A mystic from one of the villages sent them on a water crossing. That is the best I can make of their gibberish."

*Someone has a wicked sense of humour,* Kirk thought to himself. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Uhura, get hold of the transporter room; tell them to stand by. Mr. Spock, can you locate the Klingons among the ruins?"

"That is simple, sir. Rider Yen's records say that no one lives, or even stays on the northern continent for most of the time. We have two hours before the shuttle landing site is in darkness. I have the party now, and am transferring the information to the transporter room."

"Uhura, send two teams of Security men down there. Tell the operator to hold until I get there." With that Kirk entered the turbolift, followed by Spock.

The Security men snapped to attention she entered the transporter room. Mr. Spock stepped to the console and checked the coordinates.

"Stand by with phasers on stun," Kirk said. "We are about to welcome a bunch of very irate Klingons on board. Mr. Spock, energise."

"Energising, Captain."

The first group of Klingons materialised on the transporter pad.

"Welcome aboard my ship, Captain Sirapoc," Kirk greeted the bewildered Klingon.

"Captain Kirk, I demand to know the meaning of this!"

"Come, Captain, don't be like that. You are aware that you are still in Federation territory, and therefore must abide by our laws. Looting an abandoned city is a criminal offence. Lieutenant, take them away."

The Security men began ushering them from the room.

"Captain, what of your woman, this Rider Yen? Isn't she also committing the same crime?"

"The med..." Kirk broke off and pretended to cough.

"The Federation has granted Rider Yen permission to search for the treasure," Mr. Spock finished.

Dr. McCoy entered to hear Spock's last remark. "Spock!" he exclaimed as the Klingons were led out. "Did I hear you actually tell a lie?"

"Doctor, Vulcans never lie. It was not logical to enlighten the Captain at this present time."

Kirk hid his chuckle as he said, "Gentlemen, we have the rest of our prisoners to unload first, before we can be under way to collect our stranded officers."

"I wonder how much sweet Tricia Yen has to do with this treasure hunt?" McCoy muttered.

"That, I too would like to know," Kirk replied as the next group formed on the transporter. "We'll soon find out."

As soon as all the Klingons were on board the three officers returned to the bridge.

"Lt. Uhura, see if you can get hold of Mr. Sulu or Rider Yen."

Sulu and Veluga sat enjoying the view from the valley watch. Two days ago Sulu had returned with the environment tanks full of the herbs. Veluga's sister had accompanied him so that she could give the correct potion to a Healer of the Afar people.

Sulu jumped as his communicator bleeped. "Excuse me," he said to Veluga as he produced it from a pocket. "Sulu to Enterprise."

"Enterprise here. Are you and Rider Yen okay?"

"Sure, why?" he returned coolly.

"Mr. Sulu, I've a brig full of Klingons as well as a Security team on their ship," Kirk's voice answered, a note of anger in it.

"Oh, those. We kept out of harm's way."

"Mr. Sulu, I would be pleased if you could explain how you managed to persuade a Klingon Captain to go treasure hunting."

"Well, Captain," Sulu stalled, "I've an invitation from Father Veluga, with whom we are staying, to a valley celebration. We'll



explain it then. Captain, if you, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy wish to beam down, I'm alone apart from Chief Veluga."

"Very well," Kirk said, curbing his temper.

"Wonder what they're playing at?" McCoy asked.

"We'll soon find out. Gentlemen," Kirk headed towards the lift. "Lt. Uhura, inform Mr. Scott he's to command the shuttle."

"Aye, sir," she replied as the door closed.

Sulu introduced them to Veluga. "Captain, before we go to the village, let me explain something to you. To Chief Veluga's people, we are descendants of the survivors of the dead city."

"And the Klingons?" McCoy asked. "How did you explain them?"

"They are underground dwellers, with whom we are at war."

McCoy chuckled. "I like it. Wait till Scotty hears that one."

"Where is Rider Yen?"

"Down in the valley with our equipment. She'll meet us in the village."

"And how did the Klingons come to be treasure hunting in Afar?" Kirk asked, still trying to solve the mystery.

"That's Rider Yen's pigeon, I'll leave her to tell you," Sulu evaded.

"How like Tricia to make fools of Klingons. She must have nearly as many foes as you do, Jim," McCoy commented as the descended the narrow path.

As they entered the village a small boy scampered off down another track. Veluga led the party to his hut. Kirk searched the villagers who were beginning to gather, looking for Tricia. Father Veluga waved them to sit on the benches before his hut. Tega appeared with drinking vessels and a flagon of fruit juice.

"My wife," Veluga introduced her.

"Where's Tricia?" McCoy asked.

"She'll be along shortly," Tega answered pleasantly.

Veluga gradually introduced the village elders to the three officers. There was a stirring among the crowd, and a path was made for a group of girls. They stopped in the area before Veluga's hut. The veiled centre figure circled the space until she spotted someone. She raised a hand and signalled to a youth. As he came over to her she removed a scarf from her dress, collected a posy from one of her attendants, and tied it to the scarf.

"What's going on?" Kirk whispered to Veluga.

"Our Visionary is blessing an alliance," he replied.

"Visionary? Not the mystic the Klingons mentioned?" McCoy asked.

"The same," Sulu replied.

Tricia had tied the hands of the two sweethearts together and spoke the traditional words. "With these sacred flowers may the Ancient Ones bless you."

"May the Ancient Ones bless you," echoed the villagers.

"What...?" Kirk half recognised the voice.

Tricia turned to the officers and approached them. "Greetings, Captain from Afar," she said as she raised her veil.

"Rider Yen! What's going on?"

McCoy chuckled wickedly, enjoying the sight. He glanced at Spock, who had raised an eyebrow. "You crafty girl, so *that's* how you did it!" he jokingly told her off.

"Maybe I should put you in the brig with the Klingons," Kirk threatened.

"Why Captain, all I did was to keep a ship full of Klingons out of the way. No-one has been harmed, and we were able to complete our mission unhindered. The environment tanks are in the Visionary's bower with their cargo."

"Then I suppose that congratulations are in order," Kirk smiled. "By the way, how did you guess that the space trader had been here scavenging from the dead city?"

"It checked out?" Tricia asked.

"Yes. Captain Manerin passed on your query. Starfleet had his ship searched and they found some artefacts that must have come from here."

"And his next stop was Starbase 21," she concluded. "Dr. McCoy, this is Father Veluga's sister; she's here to show you how to prepare the medicine."

"There you go again, making out I'm a quack doctor," he teased.

Father Veluga broke in, "You have caught up with events and now we shall begin the celebration of the return of my adopted daughter from Afar, even though her visit has been a short one, and her friends who are also here today."

#### EPILOGUE

Captain James T. Kirk sat in his command chair thinking over the words of his next report to Starfleet Command.

"Captain's Log... Rider Yen and Mr. Sulu have successfully completed their mission. Starbase 21's victims of the Ara'cogan sleeping sickness are well on their way to recovery. The space trader has been arrested under the Protection of Planets Act. The Klingon ship we encountered in orbit around Ara'coga, and whose crew

Rider Yen and Mr. Sulu managed to prevent harming the Ara'cogans by..." *My god, how do I tell HQ that Rider Yen became a witch doctor and tricked them? "... by means of an Ara'cogan custom." That sounds good.* "The Klingons are at present crawling back to their empire, Mr. Scott having fixed their engines for minimal output." *Or rather, having filled their engine room with tribbles. Wonder where he got them?* "As a result of the events of Ara'coga, I have ordered Rider Yen to complete a detailed Anthropology report on the lives and customs of the Ara'cogans." *That should keep her out of mischief for a while.*

He turned to the communications console. "Lt. Uhura, have this sent to Starfleet Command. Captain's Log, Stardate..."



## VULCAN FIRST OFFICER

("The Galileo Seven")

Oh Spock in chains more free  
Than I shall ever be  
Keeps deep-entrenched control  
Of his beleaguered soul  
Each human impulse still  
Shrivelled by laser will  
Ash-heap whose drifting smoke  
Alone attests the stroke  
So that his sharp-set mind  
May see where we are blind

No feelings interfere  
With what's decided here  
Necessity's commands  
He wholly understands  
By logic to the end  
Lives my half-alien friend  
This being with whom I  
Would take my chance to die  
His last most desperate act  
Dictated by hard fact

Pac Deacon



# THE ATTRACTION

Oh Spock  
Extraordinary hybrid  
You did not spring  
Sudden  
Like Minerva  
From the brain of one god alone

To create you  
You masterpiece  
It took at least three -  
And then an untold number  
Who devotedly  
Added their touches  
Of loving exploration

You have become  
One of the best documented characters perhaps  
Since Hamlet

You magnet  
Whence comes your power?  
What's your secret?  
The 'heart of your mystery'?

Watching the  
Fascinating conflict  
Of will and emotion  
We hold our breath -  
Hoping for a sign, a little tell-tale  
To give the game away  
We long to hear  
The skeleton in your cupboard  
Rattle a little

Bones can do it  
He'll put the green into your cheeks  
The green of suppressed anger  
Make your eyebrow rise  
In silent outrage  
Turn your eyes to black ice -  
Hateful, magnificent Bones!

Ah, controlled Vulcan!  
Forgive us Humans  
Who root for the Human  
It takes a Kirk  
To love both your disparate selves:  
Your 'Thousandth Man'...

Pac Deacon



# SHADOW

by

Joyce Devlin

The doors of sickbay hissed open.

"Bones, I have a headache!" Jim Kirk, Captain of the Enterprise, announced to yours truly.

"That's nothing unusual, now is it, Jim?" I replied, handing him two blue wonder pills.

"Thanks," he responded as he took the glass of water I offered him.

"What's the problem now, Jim? I thought we were just star mapping."

"That's just it, Bones; only Starfleet Command has chosen the Enterprise for a little experiment."

"A little experiment like what, now?"

"Like ordering us to Starbase 10 to pick up Lt. Shadow and his handler."

"Ah?"

"We're getting a bloody *dog*, Bones!"

I tried hard not to laugh, but I couldn't help it; the look on Jim's face was a sheer picture. "You mean Starfleet has finally decided to put a security dog aboard? Well, about time, too. After all, Jim, what's the difference between having a rider aboard with her horse, and a dog handler and his dog?"

"I *like* horses. I don't like German Shepherds."

"What have you got against them?"

"Nothing, except I don't trust them," Jim answered.

I could tell there was more to it, and I was determined to find out what. "Come on, Jim, open up. What is there to be scared of?" I asked.

"I'm not scared," came the reply, a little too quickly for my liking. "It's just... well... as a kid I was rather badly bitten by my uncle's German Shepherd, and spent three days in hospital. I think I was about three or four, and as far as I can recall I got up to go to the toilet in the middle of the night, tripped over the dog, and the next thing I knew he was biting into me, and I couldn't get him off. I haven't forgotten the episode." Jim sat looking at his hands.

"You just have to try and get over your fear. It's not as if you're going to have much contact with it, and its handler will be

with it all the time, so relax."

"It's all right for you to say relax, Bones, but how the hell I managed to stay calm the last time I came face to face with two of the hairy monsters I don't know;\* and then you had to go and ask for a display! Couldn't you see I was scared to death?"

"I did wonder." In fact, Jim had covered it well. I had thought he was just annoyed at the inconvenience of beaming down to the wrong place and then being delayed as the handlers demonstrated how well trained their dogs were. "Look, Jim, do you want me to get onto Starfleet and put a medical stop on it?"

"No, I'll cope. Just don't run out of blue pills."

"I won't. Now I suggest you get yourself off to bed with these." I handed him a couple of pink knockout pills. "I'll tell Spock. Now bed, before I bed you down here in sickbay."

"On my way."

With that he was gone. I swear he managed to make those doors snap shut. It's not often our Captain gets up to high doh, but when he does it usually has something to do with orders from Starfleet Command, and this time was no exception. An incident from his early childhood, locked tightly away in his subconscious, had been unlocked. I made a mental note to inform the dog handler about it; that way the handler could avoid the Captain.

"McCoy to bridge," I said into the intercom.

"Bridge. Spock here."

"Spock, can you come down to sickbay?"

"Is it important, Doctor?"

"It could be, Spock."

"On my way."

It took Spock a few minutes to get to sickbay, and me another few to explain the situation.

"It would be logical for Jim to stay out of the dog's way, and for the dog to be kept out of his way," Spock said finally.

"It's the only way." For once we were both agreed.

"If that is all I shall return to the bridge. We will reach Starbase 10 in 1 hour 45 minutes exactly. I shall instruct the handler to report directly to you, Doctor; you can inform Lt. Jamie Anderson of the problem."

"I thought Jim said a Lt. Shadow."

"Shadow is the dog, Doctor; he also holds the rank of lieutenant. It is a custom kept on from the 20th century, when it

\*FOOTNOTE. In The Doghouse, Log Entries 76.

was the animal that held the rank, not the handler; these days it is both. Now I must get back to the bridge."

I let Spock go and punched Jim's medical number up on the computer; his file came up on the screen and I sat down to study the record of the childhood injury. I was very surprised at its severity, for the dog had managed to sever the artery that gave the eyes their vital blood supply. Jim had needed 50 stitches to close the wounds, and a further operation to remove the scars. It was no wonder he was scared of having a German Shepherd aboard, as according to the notes from his family doctor on Earth, Jim had been treated for nightmares for months after the incident.

I wasn't too worried, as he had passed all of Starfleet's medicals, both mine and at the Academy, and if there had been anything to worry about it would have been picked up.

I was so engrossed in the report that I lost track of time, and almost jumped out of my skin when a female voice said,

"Dr. McCoy, Mr. Spock told me to report directly to you."

"You are Lt. Anderson, and that, I take it, is Shadow?" I asked, pointing to the German Shepherd dog sitting at heel.

"Yes, sir, it is. Say hello, Shadow."

The dog woofed three times.

"A fine animal. Right, Lieutenant, we have a problem." I explained the situation to her, and she listened intently.

"That's no problem, Doctor. I have my own quarters and Shadow sleeps with me, eats with me, and walks with me. Hence his name, Shadow. In time the Captain will become used to seeing us around, and will accept us as part of the ship's complement. I'll need an article of clothing that the Captain has worn so that I can teach Shadow his scent."

"Why?"

"Shadow will know when he is approaching, and will warn me so I can duck out of sight, or replace his lead."

"Yes, I see. I'll get something for you."

So that was that, for the time being. Lt. Anderson was true to her word; she kept Shadow out of Jim's way. It was from Scotty that I learned that she used the vast hangar deck to give the dog a daily run and to do routine training with him. When on duty they both patrolled the lowest levels of the ship, checking and rechecking all the cargo holds, as Shadow could get into areas that were previously inaccessible to Security.

So all was quiet for once - or had I spoken too soon, for no sooner had I made that last entry than the alarm signalled collision course. *What the hell is Jim playing at?* I asked myself as I made my way to the bridge.

"Get a lock on that pilot and beam him aboard, Scotty, and fast!" Jim was saying into the intercom as I stepped out onto the

bridge. "Chekov, phasers locked on."

"Locked on target, sir," Chekov responded.

The instrument of possible collision was a craft slightly larger than our own shuttles, and no matter how Sulu at the helm changed course, she kept on coming straight for us.

"Scotty!" Jim said urgently.

"Beaming now, sir."

"Fire!"

The ship's phases blasted the small craft into cosmic dust.

"Spock, Bones, come with me. Sulu, you have the con."

When we arrived in the transporter room Lt. Anderson, Shadow, and several Security officers were there. On the transporter platform stood -

"Dave Mitchell," Jim said in recognition.

"Jim - long time no see. How about calling the hound off, old boy?"

It was then that Jim noticed the dog. "Lieutenant!" he addressed Shadow's handler.

"Sir?"

"Please remove the dog. And you lot, get out of here," he dismissed the Security team.

"Gave you a scare, did I?" Mitchell asked.

"You could say that, Dave. What brings you here?"

"I'm afraid you're stuck with me, Jim. Here are my orders. And as regards that little episode, the shuttle's computer locked on to yours somehow, and I couldn't seem to break free. Sorry. Here's a record, sir." Mitchell handed over a tricorder.

"Spock, Dr. McCoy, I'd like you to meet Gary Mitchell's younger brother, Dave."

"Lieutenant," Spock broke in. "If I might examine your tricorder?"

"By all means, sir. Once I realised what was happening I switched the tricorder on to record."

"What was wrong with your communications, system, Lieutenant?" I asked. "Couldn't you call?"

"Doctor, I passed through a magnetic storm and my communications have been out since. I can only assume that the computer was also affected. Talking of which - here, Jim. I hope these haven't been damaged. Admiral Swan ordered me to give them to you." Mitchell handed over sealed order discs to Jim.



"If you no longer need me, Captain, I will return to Sickbay. Lt. Mitchell, come along as soon as the Captain's through with you so I can give you your medical before you report for duty."

"Ugh!" was Mitchell's reply.

"Regulations, son. Jim?"

"Off you go, Bones. Dave, Spock, Briefing Room 1. Scotty, you too. Dave, I want a detailed..." I heard Jim say as the transporter room doors closed behind me.

When I arrived back in sickbay I found Lt. Anderson waiting for me in my office.

"What can I do for you, Lieutenant?" I asked as I patted Shadow's head.

"The Captain wasn't upset at seeing Shadow back there, was he, Doctor?"

"No. To be honest, he was so annoyed I don't think he even noticed him until Lt. Mitchell asked him to call the dog off," I replied.

"I thought I'd better ask. Dr. McCoy, I'm thinking of asking for a transfer off the Enterprise."

"Oh, why?"

"I don't think Starfleet is being fair to the Captain - or to Shadow, for that matter. He can't function to his full potential."

"Jamie, give it a little longer. The Captain will come round, you'll see."

"I hope so, Doctor. There's just one more thing."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Lt. Dave Mitchell."

"What about him?"

"We were in the same class at the Academy, and he hero-worshipped Gary, his elder brother, and... well..." She stopped, as though not knowing whether to go on.

"Yes?" I prompted her.

"When word came through that Gary was dead, he - Dave, that is - made some nasty threats."

"What kind of threats?"

Just threats. Like, he'd get the person responsible, that sort of thing. He actually went to pieces, and was given compassionate leave for three months. I lost track of him after that as I was assigned to the Security Kennels to complete my training. That is, until today. The look in his eyes when he saw the Captain was the same look he had when I last saw him. I don't trust him, Doctor.

Can you warn the Captain?"

"I'll tell Commander Spock what you've told me, so don't be surprised if you're called up for an interview with him. I'll also talk to the Captain. Not that I think he'll listen, but still."

Warning bells were ringing inside my head. I didn't like this one bit. I was right as regards Jim listening; his reply was simply that Lt. Anderson was sore at him for dismissing her dog. I left him to his dinner and found Spock, who really surprised me with a sympathetic ear.

"That is rather interesting," he said after I'd finished talking. "It also adds to a theory I have been forming."

"You mean that stunt he pulled?" I asked as we entered my office.

"Indeed. I have run a Class One computer check, and have fed the tricorder details into our computer, but still I come up empty-handed, to borrow a phrase from you."

"You think he rigged the whole show?"

"Yes. However, as I said, it is only theory. I cannot prove or disprove any part of his explanation."

"Rather convenient, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes. However, Lt. Uhura confirms that the type of communications panel aboard that model of shuttlecraft can be badly damaged by magnetic dust, and was rendered obsolete some time ago," Spock informed me.

"Wouldn't the panel have been updated?" I asked.

"One would have imagined so. However, the computer stated that only panels that were giving problems were replaced, part of an economy drive by Starfleet on smaller vessels such as the shuttle Lt. Mitchell was piloting."

"Thank goodness we're not affected by economy drives! I can just hear Supply now. 'Sorry, Doctor, but you'll have to cut back on the headache pills, especially the blue ones.' Wonder what Jim would say about that?" I quipped.

"Yes, Doctor; I too am glad we are not affected by that."

"So what are we going to do about Dave Mitchell?" I asked.

"There is nothing we can do, Doctor. However, I intend to watch him very closely. Just one small slip..."

"Now you sound just like me, Spock," I told him.

"Perhaps. I have learned a lesson or two from you, Doctor. Watch and observe."

"Yes, well, just don't make it too obvious what you're up to, or Jim will come down on you like a ton of bricks."

"The Captain does not weigh a ton," Spock replied.

"Yet," I muttered. I'd noticed that Jim had gained a few extra pounds over the last few weeks, and I made a mental note to put him back on a diet.

The days dragged into weeks, and I had managed to put the nagging doubt about Mitchell to the back of my mind. That was, until the Security alert, and my summons to the cargo deck by Spock, not Jim.

On my arrival I took in the scene at once. Mitchell had Jim by the throat, with a knife poised. Lt. Anderson was there with Shadow, along with Spock and several other Security men.

"Keep back or I'll cut his throat!" Mitchell was saying, pressing the knife against Jim's neck.

Anderson looked at Spock. To this day I'll swear that Spock did not change his expression, nor did Anderson move her hand, but Shadow struck swiftly and skilfully for the hand that held the knife. Jim fell to the floor. Shadow disarmed Mitchell and released his captive into the hands of Security, then lay down beside Jim, licking his face and whining.

Jim slowly came to. "I'm all right, Bones," he protested as Shadow licked his face again, and barked.

"All right, boy, all right," Jim said as Shadow moved in for another lick.

"Shadow, heel!" Anderson ordered.

"It's all right, Lieutenant. I owe my life to the dog," Jim smiled as he stood up, dusting himself off.

"Are you sure, sir?" Anderson asked.

"I was half scared out of my wits when I saw those fangs of his coming for my throat, but apart from that I'm fine."

"Who's the doctor around here?" I asked as I checked my scanner readings.

"Your mediscan is, Bones," Jim said lightly as he petted Shadow. "And you, boy, are lovely."

I refrained from saying what I wanted to in reply as there was a female present, and what I had in mind wasn't fit for her ears.

"Yes, well, you'll be a little hoarse for a few days, but apart from that you're fine," I responded instead. "Er... Jim?"

"What?" he asked, dragging his attention away from Shadow.

"I thought you didn't like German Shepherds."

"One learns something new every day. Not all animals can be blamed for what one of the breed has done. I realise now just how controlled that attack was. If he'd wanted to that dog could have taken hold of my throat, only he didn't."

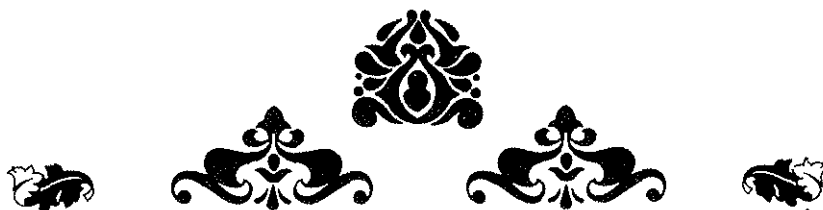
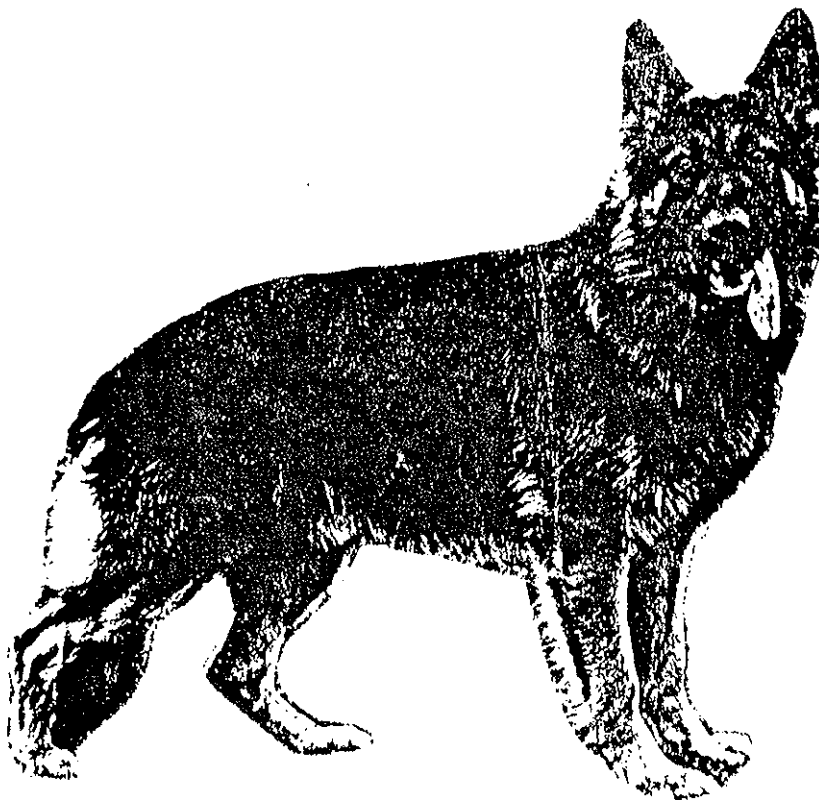
"Yes, sir, he could have," Anderson answered. "However, Shadow

here is unlike most pets, in that he's first obedience trained, then he's had specialised training. To own or have a German Shepherd that hasn't had any kind of obedience training is just asking for trouble, as this type of dog needs mental stimulation and some kind of work to do to stop it getting bored. Once a dog like this gets bored, anything can happen. Even though Shadow is highly trained I still spend the mornings before my 2 till 10 shift working with him."

Once back in sickbay Jim confided in me that he'd had two choices when Shadow sprang. First, pass out; second, wet himself. Personally, had it been me, I think I'd have done both in sheer terror.

Anyway, Shadow has proved to Starfleet Command that security dogs are worth their weight in gold. Not only did he save Jim that day, but he found the bomb Mitchell had planted in an area sensors couldn't scan. He hadn't counted on Shadow.

Like I always say, it shouldn't happen to a doctor, but nine times out of ten it does to me. One of these days I must remember to ask Jim how Mitchell managed to lure him down to the lower cargo hold. I guess he'll tell me in his own good time - if ever.



# COMMAND

by

Sandy Catchick

Jim Kirk stood alone in his temporary quarters and gazed critically at his own reflection. Faintly amused hazel eyes stared back. He didn't like what he saw. He was in good shape physically, and the gold uniform shirt fitted perfectly. Yet the effect was not the one he wished to project. He attempted a frown and managed to hold the grim lines for all of ten seconds before his humour burst through and the face before him transformed itself with the appearance of a self-effacing boyish grin.

Dammit, that was what was bothering him. That was at the core of his problem. He looked young - too young to be the Captain of a Constitution Class Starship. This was no ordinary Constitution Class Starship, but the USS Enterprise. He was still elated at having been appointed to the post. Captain James T. Kirk - the youngest Starship Captain in the history of Starfleet. He hoped fervently that he wouldn't let down the Appointments Board, or the Admiral who had made this possible.

The expected knock on his door shook him from his reverie. It was too late to change anything. He'd spent all his life hungering after and training for a ship of his own. Now he had one it was up to him to make it the best ship in the fleet. His success would depend not on his looks but on his ability to command - and that meant winning the respect of his crew and moulding them together into a fully operational team. Here at least he had some leeway. The choice of senior officers, within the exigencies of the service of course, was his. He squared his shoulders, took a last look at his mirror image, and opened the door.

Lieutenant Belson, the harassed base Liaison Officer, stood to attention and smartly saluted the young Captain. Kirk formally returned the salute and followed Belson down the corridor. En route the lieutenant filled him in, repeating what Kirk had already read in the expectancy that the Captain, like so many of the senior officers he escorted, would have forgotten half of his orders.

Captain Kirk knew these particular orders backwards. They were blazed indelibly in his mind. After all, they were the first orders he had received as Captain of the Enterprise. Understanding the lieutenant's all too difficult task, however, he smiled tolerantly as the man repeated the orders for his benefit.

"You will transport aboard the Enterprise immediately, where you will be met by Commander Spock, currently senior officer and designated Science Officer of the Enterprise. He will accompany you on your official tour of the ship, which will last two hours. You will then have a further hour within which to interview any crewmember you wish to see again. Should any further interviews be necessary, you will arrange them for the day after tomorrow, as tomorrow must be left free for final briefing. I hope that's clear, sir," Belson ended as they reached the transporter station.

Kirk nodded, suppressing a grin. He replied equally formally,

"Quite clear, thank you, Lieutenant." Then he added, "It's good of you to remind me. I'd hate to forget anything on my first tour of inspection."

Belson relaxed immediately. You never knew how officers would take things. This one was okay. "That's my job, sir," he said, handing Kirk a duplicate print-out of the Enterprise's officers, giving designations and potted histories of each. Kirk took the proffered papers, knowing he would study them very carefully indeed when he got back to his quarters.

The transporter beam took Kirk. Before he had time to get nervous he was standing in the transporter room of the USS Enterprise, gazing at the austere, expressionless features of the ship's Vulcan Science Officer.

As his hazel eyes met the alien's brown ones he got the distinct impression that the Vulcan had looked right into his mind, analysed and catalogued him. He was not sure if the Vulcan liked what he saw or not. The man's features didn't change at all, but Kirk became acutely aware of his youthfulness under such a close inspection.

They continued to lock gazes, the Vulcan's eyes never leaving his own, not even blinking. After an interminable amount of time it dawned on Kirk that the Vulcan was looking at him expectantly, as though waiting for him to say something. Suddenly the penny dropped.

"Permission to come aboard, Commander?" he asked formally.

Equally formally the Vulcan replied, "Permission granted, Captain. No doubt you will wish to commence your inspection immediately. The ship is ready."

There was no 'Welcome aboard' or 'I'm pleased to meet you, Captain', but the Vulcan did incline his head in what Kirk took to be a polite manner. This was a distinct relief to the Captain, since it meant that the Vulcan broke eye contact. He had begun to wonder if it was a battle of wills, and had determined not to be the first to drop his gaze. He knew Vulcans didn't like physical contact, and so did not offer to shake hands.

For this, Spock was much relieved. The new Captain had obviously taken the trouble to learn something about Vulcans, which meant he'd done his homework. Spock was not worried by the Captain's youth, since all Humans appeared young to him, in behaviour if not in looks. What did worry him was the rumour that the Captain liked informality, and had a strong sense of humour. Spock had never learned to understand humour in the way Humans used it, and he was a firm believer in discipline.

Spock had just turned to lead the Captain into the corridor when the whine of the transporter started up for a second time. Both men swung round in time to see a young lieutenant take form on the rear transporter disc. The Vulcan's already serious features appeared even colder, if that was possible, as his eyes bored into the young engineer standing there.

Turning to Kirk he asked, "If you will excuse me, Captain, I require a word with Lieutenant Petersen on a matter of discipline."

Not sure what else to say, Captain Kirk agreed. He couldn't

help but overhear the ensuing exchange.

"Lieutenant Petersen," began Spock icily, "are you now aware of the contents of Starfleet regulations, Chapter 32, Paragraphs 5 to 13?"

"Yes, sir," replied the downcast lieutenant, who refused to meet the Vulcan's eyes and looked steadfastly at the toe of his left boot as though it had suddenly grown points.

"And have you seen my tape of a hypothetical transportation?" continued the Vulcan relentlessly.

"Yes, sir," repeated the lieutenant, fighting to get the words out through a restriction in his throat that might, just possibly, be his own dry tongue.

"What disciplinary action would you recommend be taken against you?" asked the Vulcan.

The young man's head jerked up at this unexpected question. Dejectedly he replied, "I guess you'll have to demote me to the rank of ensign, sir. And you could, if you wish... ground me... as per regulations." The last was said in a strained voice that clearly showed how agonizing the lieutenant would find such a decision.

"What lessons have you learned?" came the next question, as though the questioner had not even heard the lieutenant's previous reply, let alone the obvious fear behind it.

There was a long pause. Finally the lieutenant's head came up again, this time looking directly at the Vulcan. "I will never do such a thing again, Mr. Spock. I swear it."

"Vulcans do not approve of swearing," came the calm response.

Captain Kirk, unable to do anything but observe, was tempted to break in with a "That's quite enough, Commander!", but he stilled his tongue. How could he criticise the Commander for behaving unfeelingly when it was a well documented fact that Vulcan had no feelings? He remembered what his friend Gary had said when he'd mentioned that the Enterprise's present Science Officer was a Vulcan. 'He's one crew member you won't have to worry about, Jim. Just press the right buttons and he'll respond the same as any computer.' Regulations appeared to be one button he should avoid pressing.

The young lieutenant, however, had spunk. He changed tack and said, "On my honour as a Starfleet officer and a gentleman, I give you my word that I will never do such a thing again, and will think before I act."

Spock nodded as though that was the answer he had expected. "Your word is quite sufficient," he said mildly. Then he added, "You are to take the night shift for the next four weeks. Dismissed, Lieutenant."

"Sir?" queried the surprised lieutenant.

"If I understand Dr. Piper's report correctly, there is nothing wrong with your hearing, Lieutenant. I will have to ask him to check your eyesight, however. I suggest you use the time allotted

to you to study Starfleet regulations more closely. Chapter 32 specifically refers to incidents aboard a Starship. If you study Chapter 48, you will see that planetary incidents are left to the superior officer's discretion. It is fortunate that a scan was initiated while you were still on the planet."

Spock didn't add that he had personally initiated a scan when he had been advised of the package the lieutenant had bought. Had anyone asked him he would have expressed his motives as being to avoid any unnecessary trouble to the ship. Never would he have admitted that he had wished to save the young lieutenant, and that he saw potential in the man.

No-one asked him to explain himself. To Spock's utter amazement, however, Petersen burst into tears. Thinking the man had had a seizure of some sort Spock approached him, and only he picked up the lieutenant's final words.

"Thank you, sir. I won't forget that you saved my life and my career, and I won't let you down." With that he turned and stumbled from the room, leaving Spock staring after him with an eyebrow raised in query at this inexplicable Human behaviour.

Kirk only saw the man's tears and his hasty flight from the transporter room. He also saw the Vulcan's raised eyebrow and misinterpreted it as a sign of satisfaction rather than query. Furiously angry at being forced to witness what appeared to be a dressing-down stage managed for the new Captain's benefit he shouted,

"When you've quite finished trying to impress me, Commander, perhaps you'll put your agile mind to performing your duty and escorting me on my tour of inspection."

Spock stared at the new Captain, aware that he had inadvertently angered him but unsure as to what he had done. The Captain was reported to be a fair man. Perhaps he was a stronger disciplinarian than he had been told, and would have preferred the lieutenant demoted, or perhaps it was the waste of time that had upset him. Spock could see no reason for such anger, and wondered at the Captain's volatile personality. It never occurred to him that Kirk might not be well versed in the contents of Starfleet Regulations per se, or that the Human might think the disciplinary action had been staged for the new Captain's benefit. He often forgot that his own almost perfect recall ability was not shared by Humans, and never in his life had he attempted to impress anyone - with the exception, perhaps, of his own father, who remained totally unimpressible.

Confused by the Captain's reaction, Spock permitted both eyebrows to reach his hairline, and he asked, "Please explain, Captain."

At first Kirk wondered if the man was joking and carrying things too far, but the Vulcan's face gave nothing away and he leaned intently towards the Captain, hands clasped behind his back, brown eyes staring directly and unflinchingly into hazel.

"Never mind," Kirk said, not sure how to take the Vulcan. "Just get on with the inspection."

"As you wish," answered Spock levelly, leading the way down the corridor. In his own mind he had concluded that the Captain felt



the interruption to be a waste of his time. He determined to allow no further interruptions to the tour.

The first location they entered was engineering. Spock raised an eyebrow as the Captain said,

"Straight to the heart of the ship. That's most logical, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan replied, "I am a logical man, Captain. However, I chose engineering to start the inspection tour as it houses the warp drive and the impulse engines. The ship itself has no heart."

Kirk sighed. "All ships, like all people, have a heart, Mr. Spock." Even as he said it he wondered if that was true of Vulcans. Perhaps not. Perhaps that was why the Science Officer found it hard to understand. Perhaps he meant soul and not heart, for the Vulcan no doubt had a heart to pump the blood around his system. Now he was getting himself bogged down. He sighed again.

Kirk's response, however, had enlightened the Vulcan, who had been thinking literally. "Ah," he said, understanding at last. "You were speaking figuratively, Captain."

It was Kirk's turn to find difficulty in understanding. It reminded him that the Vulcan was an alien, and therefore would not have the same points of reference as a Human. He would have to bear that in mind and make allowances. Seeing Spock in a new light, he wondered if he had misinterpreted the altercation with Lieutenant Petersen.

Engineering was spotless when they entered, and Kirk was impressed. Even the skeleton crew there to meet him were all assigned to tasks. Mr. Spock looked around and spotted the Chief Engineer's feet protruding from under a lower circuit duct, one leg waving in the air.

"Mr. Scott," he said, approaching the prone figure and obviously finding nothing unusual in the fact that the Chief Engineer was buried under ducting, "Captain Kirk is here to commence his tour of inspection."

A muffled "I'll be wi' ye in a minute" came floating up to them. Spock waited in silence, and Kirk found himself unwilling to start a conversation. To appear to be doing something he wandered over to look at some of the technicians.

A young man was bending over another section of panelling from which a selection of multi-coloured wires protruded, working and singing at the same time. Kirk stood and watched him until the young man turned around to face the Captain. The technician was obviously surprised at the Captain's interest.

Spock moved in smoothly to prevent any awkwardness. That was something he had learned about Humans. "This is Mr. Kevin Riley, Leading Technician," he said into the silence.

Kirk nodded pleasantly. "I did not mean to interrupt you, Mr. Riley," he said. "Please proceed with what you were doing."

Riley nodded, swallowed, and then returned to his work. Only the absence of singing indicated that the young man was no longer oblivious of the Captain's presence.

"What is he working on?" asked Kirk, looking at Spock.

Spock's response again startled the Captain. "Mr. Riley is better equipped to answer that than I am, Captain. He is an excellent engineer." So saying Spock turned to the young man and asked him to explain the function of the mnemonic circuits.

Kirk understood only one word in five of the next two minutes, but he got the impression that Riley did know what he was doing, and was delighted at the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge. He also learned a little more about the First Officer, who did not interrupt the explanation although it was obvious from the way he leaned forward that he understood every word Riley said. When Riley finished Spock nodded to him, and the technician immediately turned back to his work.

Kirk touched him on the shoulder and said, "Thank you, Mr. Riley. That was most interesting, although I'm afraid some of the technical terms were beyond me."

Spock seemed surprised by the Captain's words, and Kirk was relieved to see he did have some feeling. Since the Chief Engineer was still buried beneath his panel Kirk decided to pursue the matter.

"You appear to be surprised, Mr. Spock. May I ask why?"

Spock looked directly at Kirk, and to the Captain's amazement said, "Forgive me, Captain."

He had to ask, "Forgive you for what, Mr. Spock? I'm afraid I don't understand."

Spock replied evenly, "For my lack of control, Captain. I was indeed wondering why Humans find it necessary to say thank you to someone for doing their duty. I apologise for being so obvious, and I shall ensure that it does not happen again."

Kirk stared at him, open mouthed. He was about to ask why Spock was concerned about being obvious when surely he must be used to working with Humans, but fortuitously he had second thoughts before he spoke out loud. With relief he noticed the Chief Engineer emerging, and changed his comment into, "The Chief Engineer appears to be free now."

Spock nodded, and Kirk could see that his face had again become a mask of stone. The Captain resolved to read up on Vulcans in more detail. He had a feeling the two of them could insult each other a great deal without realising it if he did not.

The Chief Engineer smiled broadly at them. "Captain Kirk. Mr. Spock," he acknowledged. He then leaned over and wiped his hands before offering to shake Kirk's outstretched hand. "I'm right sorry for the delay, Captain, but we hae a wee problem wi' the warp engines, and I hae to do the wiring myself."

"Mr. Scott is most attached to his engines," said Spock, as though that explained everything.

"Aye," said the Engineer. "Enterprise has the best engines in the fleet, Captain, and I intend to ensure that they stay the best."

Kirk could see the pride and the honesty of the man, and was

impressed.

Spock said, "If you wish to spend some time alone with Mr. Scott, that can be arranged."

Kirk was about to reply when the Engineer said, "If you've got a moment, Mr. Spock, I'd appreciate your looking at my fuel equations. I'm close to a break-through, but there's something missing."

The Captain went back to wondering if Spock had laid this all on for his benefit. Surely the Engineer didn't need to ask for his opinion just when the Captain was present. However, when Spock turned to the computer to look at the equations, and Kirk took the Chief Engineer on one side and said, "Mr. Scott, perhaps you'd tell me a bit about your department?" he was surprised at the Scotsman's first sentence.

"Mr. Spock is a wee bit formal, Captain. He insists on calling me Mr. Scott, but most of the officers and all my friends call me Scotty." Then realising how that must sound he added, "That's no' to say that Mr. Spock isn't a friend, you understand. It's just that he likes to keep things formal."

"So I've noticed," said Kirk drily. "Tell me, Mr. Scott - I mean Scotty - did you have to ask him to look at your fuel equations now?"

Scott looked down at his feet, rather embarrassed, and Kirk was sure that Spock had asked him to ask for help, but when the reply came Kirk was not so sure.

"You've got to understand Mr. Spock, Captain. He'd do anything for anyone so long as it's not obvious he's helping. Vulcans don't like to show their emotions, and Mr. Spock will go to great lengths to hide any feelings - and that includes the wish to help people. If I asked him to look at those equations as a favour, he'd do it all right, but he'd be so embarrassed about it that I'd wish I hadn't asked. So I had to think of a way of making it matter-of-fact so he won't feel he's helped, but that it's part of his duty. I just thought that if he would otherwise be waiting around for you to complete your visit it would be an ideal opportunity for him to look at the equations, and he'd see it as logical. I hope it didn't upset you, me asking him like that. I know he's my superior officer, and I guess I could have made it official, but..."

"That's okay," Kirk said, more intrigued by the Vulcan by the minute. "Perhaps you can explain one more thing for me," he added. "A few minutes ago Mr. Spock was surprised when I thanked Mr. Riley for explaining what he was doing. He then apologised to me for looking surprised. Can you explain?"

"Aye," said Scott. "In Mr. Spock's view, you don't thank someone for doing his duty, or for doing the logical thing, so he's always surprised when someone says thank you - even after all these years. But I guess you embarrassed him by spotting his surprise. He likes to think no-one can see beyond that Vulcan mask of his. Those that know him well know he has a lot of feelings - good feelings - for this ship and crew, but anyone that knows him would go to great lengths to ensure that he never realises we know that. On Vulcan it is discourteous to show one's feelings, and Mr. Spock finds it particularly distressing to be caught showing even the

slightest emotion. I guess it's because he's half Human, and he doesn't like to be thought of as anything but Vulcan."

Kirk had read that, but seeing the First Officer he had not believed it. "Thank you, Scotty," he said, turning to the proper inspection.

They had got halfway round engineering and were just inspecting the core reactor itself when Spock interrupted them. The Vulcan's voice was flat, but what he said made the hair on the back of Kirk's neck stand on end and Scott's smile vanished to be replaced by a look of anger.

"Mr. Scott, there is nothing wrong with your equations. However, the fuel for the warp drive engines has been sabotaged - which is why the efficiency improvements will not work."

Spock might have been announcing that dinner was ready for all the reaction he gave. For an instant Kirk wondered if this was another ploy to attract his attention, but Scott's look of horror made him disregard this immediately.

The Scotsman said, "Sabotaged! What have they done? What will happen to my bairns?"

The Vulcan's calm seemed unreal against Scott's agitation, but somehow it seemed to work as a balm as he replied, "They appear to have altered the balance by removing the kironite from the fuel. Should we attempt to engage warp drive not only will the engines blow up, but also all parts of the system through which the fuel passes will need to be completely cleaned before they can be used again."

"But that's monstrous!" said Scott, beside himself with disgust that anyone could do such a thing to engines.

"Indeed," replied the Vulcan. Turning to Kirk he added, "I await your orders, Captain."

Kirk suddenly realised that he was the Captain. This was his responsibility. Yet what could he say? What could he do? He didn't know the people. He couldn't just call up and say, "Helmsman, whoever you are", or "Doctor, whoever you are", could he? As these thoughts tore around his brain he realised that the Vulcan was watching him. Damn the man, he thought. No doubt this would make his day.

But again he found himself revising his opinion as Spock seemed to sense his confusion and said very quietly indeed, so that not even the Chief Engineer could hear him, "With your permission, Captain, I could alert the ship."

Suddenly Kirk found himself feeling grateful to this strange man who had asked for his orders yet who obviously considered himself capable of dealing with the situation. He found his voice, and with a tight smile said, "Please take over, Mr. Spock, and report back to me when ready. I shall make my way to the bridge."

Spock nodded, and had turned to the intercom before Kirk had moved. "Spock to bridge," he announced.

"Lieutenant Alden here," came the instant reply.

"Put me on ship-wide, Mr. Alden," continued the Vulcan.

His rock steady voice could soon be heard from every speaker on the ship. "This is Mr. Spock. The ship's fuel supplies have been tampered with. As of now, this ship is on yellow alert, and any unauthorised personnel or suspicious actions should be reported to the Security Chief."

At this announcement quite a few heads were raised in engineering itself, where they understood the delicate nature of the engines and the risk of explosion, but there was no discussion. Kirk found this unnatural, until Spock made his way out of engineering, and the swishing shut of the automatic doors acted as a signal for voices to be raised in query. Scott soon restored order and had his engineers working frantically at checking circuits.

Feeling a bit out of it Kirk asked directions to the bridge, refusing the offer of an escort when there was work to be done. He soon found himself in the turbolift wondering what he himself could do. It dawned on him that as Captain he was supposed to get other people to do things, but as he didn't yet know this crew it was better for Spock to do that. Then he smiled - a naughty, boyish smile. He had had an idea of what he could do.

The bridge crew soon found out what the Captain's idea had been. Mr. Alden was the first to notice his arrival and to announce, "Captain on the bridge."

Since the man was sitting at the communications station, and Kirk had heard his conversation with Spock, he began, "Mr. Alden, I assume?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, aye, sir," came the surprised and pleased reply.

"Would you do me the honour of introducing me to the rest of the bridge crew, please," said Kirk.

He was formally introduced to the only two other people present, Mr. Bush, a computer technician, and Mr. Troy, the assistant navigator. When he asked where the helmsman and navigator were he was informed that the former had been ordered planetside by Mr. Spock, and the latter had yet to be assigned.

"Now, Mr. Alden," said Kirk, a hint of amusement tinging his voice, "please patch me in to Base Command. I wish to speak to the Admiral."

"Aye aye, sir," was the quick reply.

The next few minutes were a joy to behold for Messers. Alden, Bush and Troy. Never before had they seen an Admiral floundering for words before a mere Captain, and one so recently appointed, at that. James Kirk, his face as straight as straight could be, only an occasional twitch of his arm on the chair rest giving any hint of the iron control he was exercising over his sense of humour, was bawling out Base Command for allowing sabotaged fuel to be brought aboard the Enterprise. Within seconds the Admiral had passed Kirk on to the Security Chief - with some relief - and within minutes there were people crawling around the whole of the dry dock facilities trying to answer Kirk's questions, which had been delivered like a string of bullets, each hitting its target.

"I want to know where that fuel came from, who ordered it, who signed the order, how it was transported, when it was last checked for purity, who had access to it from that point onwards..."

The list was endless. When the harassed Security Chief attempted to duck one of the issues - the list of people who could have had access to it - he soon wished he hadn't.

"Surely it is pointless to list people with access to the fuel, sir. That list must be enormous," came the whining question.

Kirk's response was predictable - to anyone who knew him well. "Mr. Ribbins" - and the name was drawn out, almost holding the man squirming before him - "where the safety of my ship and my crew are concerned *nothing* is pointless or too much to ask. I want that list, and I want it within the next 20 minutes, or heads will roll. And yours will be near the top of my list. I hope we understand each other."

Kirk smiled as he said that last, but there was no humour in him now. He hated bureaucrats, and especially those who put his ship and his people in danger. The Security Chief cut the link rather abruptly, but not before he had assured the Captain that all his questions would be researched immediately.

Kirk would have laughed if he could have seen the stream of people appear from the security offices and suddenly start running in different directions following up his points. But even he would not have laughed for long - safety and people's lives were a serious business for him.

Mr. Spock had arrived on the bridge to see the end of Kirk's conversation with the Security Chief. He was impressed with the way the new Captain got the Base to act, and kept his eyes on the man as he walked towards his science station. Their eyes met as Kirk turned to ask Alden to patch his through to Base Supplies. He never completed the request to Alden, but smiled broadly at the Vulcan in welcome.

Spock was so taken aback that his steps faltered and he only just prevented himself from falling into the well, something he had never experienced before. His confusion was obvious for only a fleeting moment before he resumed his normal calm, but Kirk did not miss it. He noted it as something to pursue later.

"Report, Mr. Spock," he said instead, giving the Vulcan time to gather himself.

Spock filled him in quickly and precisely. The bridge personnel had been advised that under no circumstances was warp drive to be engaged without Spock's all-clear first. Mr. Kelso had been despatched to obtain supplies of kironite from the base, Mr. Sulu was working on the equations to add the kironite to the current fuel mix, and Mr. Scott had confirmed no damage to the dilithium crystals or to the supply pipes.

Kirk nodded and said, "Thank you, Mr. Spock," which earned him another raised eyebrow. *You don't thank Vulcans for doing their duty*, thought Kirk, smiling again. But then he thought, why shouldn't he? He'd thank anyone else. He didn't need to expect Spock to respond as a Human might, but then Spock didn't expect him to act as a Vulcan might. With that decision made, Kirk felt easier and added, "That was a good idea to send someone for the kironite."

Hopefully with my stirring things up down there Mr. Kelso should have little problem obtaining it."

"Indeed, Captain," came the reply, with an added, "and you appear to have sorted out Base most effectively, Captain."

Kirk wondered if the Vulcan was joking or being sarcastic, but if so he gave no sign of either. The Vulcan ended, "It had not occurred to me to pursue Base Security," and Kirk realised the Vulcan found the omission worrying.

"Are you annoyed with yourself, Mr. Spock?" he asked, gently teasing.

Spock stood on his dignity. "Annoyance is a Human emotion, Captain. As Science officer, it was my duty to point out the possible consequences on Base."

Kirk laughed out loud and got a cold Vulcan stare in response. Then he said, "You seem to have handled the ship end most efficiently, Mr. Spock, and I did not ask you to investigate the Base end."

Spock acknowledged this, but replied, "I shall review my handling of the situation most carefully, and ensure such an omission is not repeated," but Kirk got the impression that the coldness was no longer there. Perhaps they were reaching some sort of understanding.

"Since there's not much else for us to do right now, Mr. Spock, shall we continue with the inspection?" Kirk asked.

"As you wish, Captain," came the polite response as the Vulcan closed down his station and led the Captain into the turbolift.

They resumed the tour in the botany labs. Spock explained that Mr. Sulu was the expert, but as he was working on the fuel equations Ensign Rush would explain the main features of the department. She thoroughly enjoyed explaining about the research they were undertaking on unusual plant life, and Sulu's pet project on plants that responded to Human speech or touch.

They then went on to the science labs themselves, where Spock gave the overview, but let his staff explain specifics; and finally life sciences.

Next would be the computers, which Spock knew inside out. He gave Kirk a rundown of the present computer system used on board and the modifications he and Mr. Scott had made to the original design. Again Kirk was confused by the jargon, but he gathered that the Enterprise's computers were now far superior to those originally installed.

They had just emerged into the corridor when the ship suddenly lurched violently and both men were thrown off balance. Spock's Vulcan reflexes allowed him to recover quickly and he put out an arm to save the Captain from hitting the bulkhead.

This time Kirk wasted no time on thank you's. "What was *that*?" he asked

"Unknown," said Spock, but he had already turned to the wall communicator and was asking for information. Even before he had completed his question the sirens came on.

"That's the collision warning," said Kirk.

"Indeed," said Spock.

"But that's impossible!" said Kirk. "We're in dry dock here - how can we collide with anything?"

"It is possible that something has collided with us, Captain," said the Vulcan as both made their way to the turbolift and towards the bridge.

As they emerged onto the bridge Kirk gestured for the sirens to be cut off, and Mr. Alden complied. "Status report?" he asked of the bridge in general.

The three junior officers had all turned to their stations, and Mr. Alden reported that there appeared to be damage to one of the science labs, but he was having trouble finding out just how serious it was. It was Spock who filled in the gaps from his computer station.

"We appear to have been hit by a small craft, Captain. The outer hull is damaged, and Science Lab 5 appears to have been holed." His voice was just as stable as he added, "If the contents of Lab 5 escape from their receptacles and mix together there will be an explosion. I estimate this will be within 15 minutes unless we eject the contents of the lab safely."

"Get the emergency teams down there," said Kirk, "and seal off the whole area."

"Already in hand, Captain," replied Spock calmly.

Kirk paced the bridge, Spock read the information coming up on his screen, and the three junior officers held their breath.

Finally Spock reported, "Three men are trapped in Lab 5, Captain. Unless they can be brought out within the next 8.5 minutes we will have no option but to eject them also."

Kirk looked shocked. "These are people, crewmen, friends, Mr. Spock. Surely there is some way we can save them?"

Spock was already working on that, although he was not about to admit it. "There is a possibility that they will be able to escape through the ventilation duct, Captain. I have ordered Mr. Scott's people to investigate. Unless they can escape within the next 8 minutes, however, we will have no alternative. If Lab 5 blows the whole ship will go with it."

Kirk accepted the inevitable. What a start to his first command! Spock commenced to relay the situation as reported to him by one of Mr. Scott's engineers.

"One crewman has been pulled out of the ventilation shaft. One is seriously injured and the third is attempting to drag him out."

All was quiet for a while, then Spock suddenly stiffened. "The injured crewman is trapped in the ventilator and the third is stuck



behind him." In the same toneless voice he continued, "We have a three-minute safety margin left, Captain."

Kirk started to sweat.

Spock continued, "Mr. Scott has rigged the lab to eject at my command, Captain." He did not ask Kirk to give the order and the Captain understood that he was prepared to give it himself if Kirk did not wish to as he added, "Such a decision has no emotional overtones for me."

The last was said very quietly, and Kirk realised that only he could hear what Spock had said. He thought, at last, that he was beginning to understand this man. Scott had been right about him. "When I give you the command, Mr. Spock," he said very firmly.

The Vulcan nodded, accepting the Captain's decision on the matter, and Kirk was unaccountably grateful for the lack of bravado. Kirk found his palms were sticky and rubbed them against the leg of his trousers. He realised this gave him away to the others who, all but the Vulcan, were staring at him, glad not to be in his shoes.

The Vulcan started a slow countdown, his voice as even and inflectionless as ever. When he reached zero Kirk still made no move. Scott's voice came through to the Vulcan on his earpiece, pleading with him to order the ejection before they were all blown up. A Human would probably have ordered the ejection at that point through nervousness, but Spock said calmly, "We are now 30 seconds beyond the safety margin," as though he had never heard Mr. Scott.

Kirk waited a final minute, until he knew he could wait no more. "Give the order, Mr. Spock," he said, and the Vulcan could see what the decision cost the man.

Interesting, since the Captain knew none of the crewmen involved. Spock knew all three, and Miss Alan particularly well. He had not mentioned that one of the crewmen was a female, since he knew Humans were even more distressed when female crewmembers were injured. He didn't even admit to himself that he would mourn the loss of Miss Alan, since she had been an apt pupil.

He calmly passed on the order. "Eject now, Mr. Scott." He heard the muttered, "About time, too," but did not mention it to the bridge in general.

They all heard the dull sound, similar to an explosion, as the contents of Lab 5 were ejected. They all felt the jolt, too.

"Mr. Scott reports the lab firmly sealed off. There is no further risk of explosion," said Spock into the silence. He added, "Dr. Piper advises that Mr. Reeves is suffering from shock, but is otherwise unharmed."

"What about the other two crewmen?" asked Kirk after a long pause.

"Both dead," said Spock matter-of-factly.

"Who were they?" asked Kirk.

"Ensign Paul Roberts and Ensign Dominique Alan," replied the Vulcan.

At this Mr. Troy jumped up and ran across the bridge to the Vulcan. Ignoring everyone else he started to hit out at him savagely as he yelled, "You cold-blooded murderer! You knew Dominique! You knew I loved her! How could you just stand there and order her killed? You don't even care! I hate you - I'll hate you for as long as you live!"

Spock attempted to protect himself from the blows by covering his face with his hands, but he made no effort to stop the man's actions or to retaliate. In a very quiet voice he said, "There was no alternative, Mr. Troy."

Edward Troy was not appeased in the slightest. "It's not what you did, Mr. Spock, it's the bloody-minded way you did it. Not once did you show any feelings for her or for Paul, yet you knew them both. Dominique worshipped you, and you didn't even care."

"My showing emotion would not change the situation, Mr. Troy," the Vulcan tried again. He was about to explain further when Troy, finding his way to the Vulcan's face blocked, suddenly changed tactics and went for a blow to the stomach. He ducked under Spock's loose guard and hit the Vulcan very hard below the belt. They all heard the breath go from the Vulcan's body, but somehow he managed to keep on his feet.

Kirk, who had been immobilised at first by the speed of the attack and the intensity of the man's hatred, was the first to recover. He dived across the bridge and caught Troy by the back of his shirt.

"Let me go!" yelled the young man, striking out at the Captain in his attempt to break free and follow up his assault on the Vulcan.

"Don't just stand there," said Kirk, still struggling with Troy but speaking to Alden. "Get the doctor up here with a tranquilliser immediately."

Spock, unworried by the risk of injury to himself, was not so immune to risk to the Captain. Unwinding himself from the doubled-over position into which Troy's blow had forced him, he reached over and calmly applied the Vulcan neck pinch to Troy's shoulder. The young man collapsed.

"What did you do?" asked Kirk nervously, wondering if the man had been killed.

Spock replied, "He is uninjured, Captain. I have rendered him unconscious until the doctor arrives. I had hoped to be able to reason with him, but I could not allow him to injure you."

"You weren't bothered whether he injured you," said Kirk, his voice reaching Dr. Piper's ears as he ran onto the bridge, Mr. Scott right behind him.

"What happened?" the doctor asked, going immediately to the fallen man.

Spock responded. "He was a... close friend... of Miss Alan. He was upset that I did not respond emotionally when I gave the order for her death."

"That's ridiculous, Spock," said Scott, coming forward and

peering down at the young assistant navigator. "If it'd been me I'd a blown the lab long before you'd let me, and I wasna' being particularly unemotional. I told ye to let me blow it. You couldna' wait any longer. Ye know that."

"That was not the young man's objection," said Spock. "He seemed to believe some emotional display was in order."

"He seems to have given one of his own," replied the dour Scotsman. "Are ye all right?"

"Quite functional, thank you, Mr. Scott," was the reply.

Dr. Piper was not so sure. "Functional or not, Mr. Spock, I want you in sickbay now for a checkup." He could see the blood welling from the corner of the Vulcan's mouth, and also the way he held himself even more erect than usual. Besides, he wanted to know more about Troy's reaction, and knew Spock would tell him nothing in front of the others. "If I might see Mr. Spock for a few minutes, Captain?"

Kirk nodded his agreement, but as the Vulcan followed doctor and patient into the lift he added, "You didn't tell me Scotty was pushing you to give the order, Mr. Spock. That might have made a difference to Mr. Troy."

Spock raised an eyebrow. "I do not see the significance, Captain." The turbolift doors shut behind him before Kirk could explain.

Within seconds the Captain had forgotten both Spock and Troy as a priority signal came through from base and was put on the main screen. The screen filled with the harassed face of the Security Chief. The man looked much older than he had when Kirk had spoken to him only a few minutes ago, and Kirk couldn't believe his request had done this to him.

"Have you had problems with your investigation?" Kirk began immediately.

The Security Chief looked at the Captain, envying his his calm appearance. "No, sir," he replied. "However, we have discovered that the sabotage applies to the fuel of every ship currently in dry dock, and is part of an enormous plot to secure the release of two important Orion prisoners. It was their vessel that collided with your own, Captain. As you are the only Starship in the vicinity, and are the only vessel that has already started re-balancing your fuel supplies, you have urgent orders from the Admiral to commence immediate pursuit of the Orion vessel and re-take the prisoners, or failing that, destroy them."

Kirk interrupted, "But we're still in dry dock, and we've only got a skeleton crew on board!"

The Security Chief ignored the interruption. "The Admiral is well aware of your position, Captain. However, he is sure that you can handle it. He recommends you launch as soon as practicable and pursue on impulse power until such time as your warp drive engines are working. Your ship has priority for take-off, and work has already commenced to disengage from dry dock. Good luck, Captain."

The man turned and gave some orders over his shoulder, then suddenly came back to Kirk just before the Captain switched off the

screen. "Oh," he said, "the Admiral asked me to wish you luck, and to say that he hopes this mission will give you a chance to get to know your crew before you make your final selection."

Kirk gestured to Lt. Alden to cut off the transmission, and he then took the opportunity to swear, none too quietly. Recovering himself, he turned to Alden.

"You heard the man, Mr. Alden. Let's get ready for departure. Please call Commander Spock and Lt. Kelso to the bridge. I also need a navigator - who would you recommend?"

Alden hesitated only a moment before replying, "Mr. Spock would have suggested moving Mr. Kelso onto navigation and putting Mr. Sulu on helm. I overheard him recommending to Captain Pike that Mr. Sulu be moved to helm."

"Very well," said Kirk. "Get Mr. Sulu up here too."

It was not quite that simple, of course. Sulu was working on the fuel equations, and in the end it was young Mr. Riley who came to take over on the bridge, and he was moved into the navigator's chair. Lee Kelso came in and took over helm. He had done his part in obtaining the kironite, and when informed of their new mission said,

"That explains the ease with which I picked up the kironite supplies. I knew it had to be more than my charm that turned that young lady's head." They all laughed, and the atmosphere became more relaxed.

Kirk sat in the command chair and issued a message to all crew members explaining the situation and the need for speed. He called a senior officers' briefing to be held on the bridge in ten minutes time.

Turning back to Lt. Alden he asked, "Where the devil has Spock gone to? I thought you were recalling him to the bridge."

The lieutenant suppressed a giggle, but had to let it out when Kevin Riley started to laugh. Kirk wondered what he'd said until Riley remarked, "I guess the devil is most likely to know where Mr. Spock has gone."

Kirk joined in the general laughter, but quickly came back to the serious business of running the ship. Alden advised that Mr. Spock had confirmed he was on his way.

"He's taking his time," said Kirk.

At that moment Spock appeared from the turbolift. Kirk looked at him and said, "About time too, Mr. Spock. Is Mr. Troy okay?"

Spock walked stiffly over to his station and Kirk thought, *Damn, I've upset him again.*

His reply was quite calm and composed, however. "Mr. Troy is still under sedation, Captain. However, Dr. Piper is with him, and he assures me he will recover in time."

"Good," said Kirk. He then proceeded to fill the Vulcan in on what had happened.

Spock listened intently and approved Mr. Riley's move to navigation. He said he would contact Mr. Sulu and check on progress with the fuel as well as completing arrangements for departure. No-one noticed the careful way Spock seated himself at his station, and since no-one had specifically asked him about his own state of health (for which he was greatly relieved) he managed to resume his post without question. He knew if Dr. Piper had seen him he would not have been allowed back on duty, but the young doctor who had examined him had been totally unused to Vulcans, and Spock had managed to cover the pain he was feeling in his lower body. He knew it would need treatment in time, but believed that the current pursuit of the Orion prisoners was of greater importance. He could return to sickbay when they had been caught. He was much relieved that no-one paid him any attention and he soon forgot his own pain through concentrating on giving orders for their departure and for re-mixing the fuel. He hoped he could do most of it from his science station, and was grateful the briefing was to be on the bridge.

The Enterprise took off precisely one minute before the officers' briefing. It was a record for departure speed from space dock. Spock had managed to compensate for the loss of Lab 5, but had reminded both the helmsman and the navigator to bear in mind the effects on the Enterprise, particularly in relation to intricate movements. Both Riley and Kelso nodded their understanding of the situation, and both made personal resolutions not to let the Vulcan down.

The briefing was more a matter of gathering ideas than anything else since little was known of the Orion situation. Kirk made it clear that their orders were to recapture, or failing that destroy, the Orion prisoners. Spock was not too keen on that, but made only a token protest. Scott was delighted to be able to report that the warp drive engines were back on line - and he commended Sulu for his work with re-balancing the fuel. The dilithium crystals had been checked, and all was ready to start up the engines.

Kirk gave the order. It would take time for the engines to warm from a completely cold start, and he was worried that they would lose the Orion craft in that time. Spock's report put his mind at rest about that, but worried him nevertheless.

"I have the craft on long-range sensors, Captain. They are using only impulse power themselves, although the design of the PH42 craft has warp power up to warp 4. Further, my sensors indicate a greater power source than would be normal for such a craft. It would appear that the craft has been designed with this rescue mission in mind. I fail to see why they have not availed themselves of this in their escape."

"You mean they've got enhanced warp power."

"I believe that is what I said, Captain."

"Could they match the Enterprise?"

"Unlikely, Captain. Even a redesigned craft of that size and shape would have difficulty in reaching above warp 8. However, it is possible that the Orions have made a breakthrough in warp engine design. I understand that the Romulans are missing some blueprint designs based on experimental work on warp engines, and an Orion craft was seen in the area at the time, retreating at high warp speed."

"So..." said Kirk, "why aren't they trying to get away?"

"Unknown, Captain. It would be logical for them to make their escape with all speed," replied Spock.

Kirk thought about it some more. "How about their sensors? Do they know we are following them?"

"Unquestionably," said the Science Officer. "Orions have the best sensors known to the Federation, as befits such... traders."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. That explains everything."

The Vulcan's eyebrows rose alarmingly, and a little frown appeared above his eyes. After a moment he spoke again. "I do not follow your reasoning, Captain."

Well, thought Kirk, *at least he is honest about it*. He could tell from the faces around him that Spock had not been alone in not understanding. No-one else had admitted their lack of understanding.

"It's like this, Mr. Spock. If they can see us, and if they believe that they have incapacitated our warp drive, then they must believe that we are following on impulse power merely to discover their destination. They are not worried since they believe we will blow ourselves up if we go into warp drive; but they don't want that to happen within easy distance of Earth tracking stations, or others will be sent to take our place. Therefore logically," and here Kirk smiled at the Vulcan, "they will lead us a merry dance until they have us in neutral space, and then they'll go into warp drive in the expectation that we will blow ourselves up following them."

Spock's frown disappeared as he listened. "Your theory would appear to fit the known facts, Captain. There is only one thing I do not follow."

"What's that?" asked the Captain.

"Why would the Orions consider dancing, merrily or otherwise?"

There was general laughter around the bridge. Only Spock's face remained impassive, and for a moment Kirk thought he was joking. "Is that a joke?" he asked.

"Vulcans do not play jokes, Captain," came the terse reply.

However, when Kirk explained that it was just an idiom meaning that the Orions hoped to lead them on a false trail and then turn and finish them off, and Spock replied that he could have said so in the first place, Kirk had a distinct feeling that the Vulcan's eyes had glinted with veiled amusement, just for a moment. He realised that the bridge crew had relaxed immeasurably, and was grateful for the interruption.

"Are you sure it wasn't a joke, Mr. Spock?" queried Kirk a final time.

The Vulcan looked affronted, and everyone else started to laugh again, but as Spock returned to his post he did not miss the Captain's wink aimed directly at him. He had not believed himself that transparent. No-one else had seen through his masquerade. He began to consider the Captain very carefully indeed - and he began

to like what he saw, in spite of himself.

Kirk's analysis was proved right. As soon as they moved out of range of Earth's tracking stations the Orion craft moved into warp speed. They were clever - they moved off at warp 1, believing that the Enterprise would blow herself up as soon as she engaged warp drive. The Orions got a nasty shock when the Enterprise followed them smoothly into warp 1.

Lt. Alden grinned suddenly. "I've got them on audio, Captain. In their excitement they seem to have forgotten to block us out."

"Let's hear them, then," said Kirk, grinning back at the Communications Officer.

Orion voices filled the bridge, and as Lt. Alden switched on the universal translator could be understood by all. They were blaming one another for the Enterprise's ability to follow them.

"Let's worry them some more, Lieutenant," said Kirk. "Patch me through to that vessel."

Kirk's voice could be heard throughout the Enterprise, although the universal translator lost some of the potency in its translation. "This is Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise. Orion craft, surrender your prisoners immediately and no-one will be harmed. If you attempt to get away from us I shall be forced to pursue you, and cannot guarantee the safety of your crew or your prisoners."

There was no reply. Kirk was not surprised. He ordered Mr. Spock to organise a boarding party.

Spock, knowing himself not to be totally fit, hesitated. "I should prefer it if you would choose someone else, Captain," he said mildly.

Kirk met his eyes, and for the first time the Vulcan looked away. Kirk had not yet learned to read the Vulcan, or he would have heard warning bells. Instead he saw it as Spock's lack of confidence in his own ability to command such a boarding party. "That was not a request, Mr. Spock," he said. "I gave you a direct order."

Spock looked up at last and met the hazel eyes. He nodded his assent and turned to his board to call up the members of the boarding party. It consisted of Mr. Sulu and four security guards as well as himself, with a further six security guards ready for second beam across as soon as that was possible.

Spock found he could move without too much difficulty and saying, "With your permission, Captain," made for the turbolift. Kirk couldn't fathom the expression he saw on the Vulcan's face, but it worried him.

Within three minutes the whole boarding team was ready, with communicators and phasers issued, the latter set on stun. Spock gave them a quick briefing and then led them onto the transporter. They were soon beamed across to the Orion vessel.

They took the first set of Orions by surprise and Spock,

leading his team, made quick work of two men with the Vulcan neck pinch. It was as he rose from releasing the second man onto the floor that things started to go wrong for him. A large burly man grabbed him from behind, and as he struggled to bring his weight forward against the pull, the Orion's partner hit him with tremendous force with a baton. Normally Spock would have been able to cope with even such a blow, although it would have hurt him, but on top of the damage he had suffered from Mr. Troy's earlier punch Spock felt something give inside him, and the pain that exploded in his mind was too great for even a Vulcan to ignore. He was prevented from doubling over, an instinctive reaction, by the man still holding onto him from behind, and only Sulu's intervention prevented him from departing the battle there and then. The young oriental was short, although compactly built, and he looked tiny compared to the two men tackling Spock, but he didn't hesitate as he went to Spock's rescue. He had seen the baton strike, and thought they would kill the Vulcan if he didn't intervene. He yelled like a Samurai warrior and struck as swiftly and with as much deadly force as any Ninja. The man who had been holding Spock was forced to release him, and soon found himself flying through the air, where his own weight began to tell against him. He did not wake up when he hit the bulkhead.

Spock was having difficulty making it to his feet, but managed to warn Sulu of a third Orion creeping up from behind. Sulu turned to face his antagonist just in time and was helped by a security guard who, having disposed of his own attacker, moved in to face the man with the baton.

Spock realised that he was in no shape to continue leading the boarding party. He got Sulu's attention and handed over command to him, telling him that his orders were to get the two Orion prisoners safely aboard the Enterprise, together with as many of the Orion rescue crew as possible.

At this point one of the Orions decided that they were about to lose the battle, with the second team having beamed aboard from the Enterprise and joined in the melee. He had no intention of returning to Earth as a prisoner, and opted for suicide. Spock read his intention in his eyes and moved in to stop him, but he was too slow. He tackled the man before he was able to set off his second set of charges, but not before he set off the first charge.

With the certain knowledge that the charge was about to blow, Spock yelled to all the Enterprise people to abandon ship and take the Orions with them. The fight was over and the Enterprise crew were the victors, but it would be a short-lived victory if everyone was blown up.

Spock himself attempted to stop the charge going off, following the small flame on its route to the actual explosive. The Orion determined to stop him. The fight was brief, Spock getting the upper hand through sheer determination, pushed on by the thought of all the lives that would be wasted if the Orion won, and managed to set off the second set of charges. But even the short time it took Spock to overcome the Orion was too long to give him any chance of extinguishing the flame. He watched in fascination as it travelled the final inch to the explosives, and then found himself thrown into the air. He had already lost consciousness before he hit the far bulkhead and crumpled to the floor, blood running from a jagged, deep cut across his forehead.

Sulu had seen the final struggle as he harried the last of his



team across to the beam-up point. He had already realised that Spock was not going to make it to the flame before the charges were ignited. Only Spock's insistence that he get the Orions to the Enterprise stopped him from going back to help - and saved him from being caught in the explosion.

Sulu materialised in the Enterprise's transporter room to face a pacing Captain Kirk, worried about what was going on aboard the Orions ship when he was not there to see for himself. When Sulu reported about the explosion and Spock being caught up in it, Kirk didn't waste a moment, but ordered himself beamed aboard the Orion vessel. He gave instructions for a rescue team to follow him with full fire-fighting equipment.

Kirk took a moment to get his bearings aboard the Orion ship. The whole place was shrouded in smoke, which was thick, almost black, and pungent. He coughed and wiped his eyes, which had already begun to water with the smoke. A shaft of air blew the smoke in a billowing cloud, and cleared the view for a moment, and Kirk caught sight of a blue shirt at the far side of the craft. He was half way to the Vulcan when he tripped over something on the floor, and in trying to regain his balance discovered the body of the Orion Spock had fought with. The man still had part of the fuse wire in his hand, but he was quite dead. Kirk hoped fervently that he was not one of the prisoners they were supposed to be returning to Earth.

When he reached Spock he found the Vulcan's body to be ominously still; but when he swore as he tripped over a piece of loose wire from the navigation console he saw Spock's head turn towards him, although the Vulcan made no sound, and no further movement. "Spock!" he yelled.

The Vulcan turned fully towards him and said, "Captain. What are you doing here?"

Kirk ignored the question and asked one of his own. "Are you okay? We've got to get out of here before the rest of this tub goes up in smoke - and us with it."

Spock remained where he was, although Kirk could see nothing wrong with him, and nothing pinning him down. He leaned towards the Vulcan, lost his footing in the loose wiring, and brought himself up short about an inch in front of Spock's face. The Vulcan didn't stir. Kirk realised suddenly that Spock was quite blind. Blood from a vicious cut on his forehead had run into both his eyes and congealed there. The Vulcan was working on sound alone. "Captain?" he asked, unsure of what had happened, but hearing the movement near him.

"It's okay, Spock," said Kirk, as much to reassure himself as the Vulcan. "Let me wipe that blood away, and then you'll be able to see." As he spoke he started to rub gently at Spock's face with the sleeve of his shirt, which he had removed for the purpose - necessity is the mother of invention.

Spock made no sound, although Kirk was sure it must hurt. Finally he said, "I can see now, Captain."

Kirk desisted from his rough attempt at a clean-up, tore off the sleeve, and tied it around Spock's head to keep further blood from falling in his eyes. "We've wasted enough time," he said. "Let's get out of here."

Spock attempted to oblige, and made it to his feet before the pain hit him. It was so intense that he couldn't even identify where it came from. He only knew that the lower half of his body felt as if it was on fire, although he knew he had been thrown well away from the flames. Spock held position, attempting to control the debilitating sensations through Vulcan mind control.

Kirk saw him freeze and misinterpreted it as a sign of fear. "It's all right, Spock," he said gently. "I'm with you. We'll make it back to the Enterprise. The fire's not that close to us."

The Vulcan ignored him, or appeared to. Kirk decided the only thing to do was to take Spock's arm and lead him back through the smoke. He put out an arm to do this, and found instead that his brain was filled with a paralysing pain.

Spock, on the other hand, felt Kirk's touch enter his mind through his lowered shields, bringing with it strong emotions of concern, fear and determination, all mixed together. The concern for him was strongest, and touched the Vulcan deeply. He slammed up his mental shields with an effort and concentrated on keeping the pain from Kirk rather than on controlling it, since the Captain was still in physical contact with him.

"If you would remove your arm, Captain, the pain will disappear," said Spock, as gently as Kirk had spoken only seconds before.

The request slowly penetrated Kirk's befuddled brain and he let go of Spock. Immediately his mind cleared. With instant insight it dawned on him that it was *Spock's* pain he had been feeling. "Spock!" said Kirk; and then again, more quietly, "Spock."

"I am functional, Captain," came the calm response. "However, I did not anticipate your actions, and so was unable to raise my shields in time to protect you from the pain. It will not happen again."

"What's wrong?" asked Kirk, who couldn't believe that anyone could be suffering such pain in silence.

"I am unable to concentrate sufficiently to identify the problem, Captain," said Spock, as though he was discussing the weather or a routine status report. He knew he needed Kirk's assistance to get out of there, but was reluctant to ask for it. However, by remaining where he was he was endangering the Captain's life as well as his own. "If I could..." The Vulcan hesitated, unsure of how to frame his request, and unsure of whether he really could keep his shields in place long enough to keep the Captain from feeling his pain.

Kirk read him easily. "Spock! You don't have to ask," he croaked, half choked with emotion at the thought that this man was afraid to ask for his help in a situation like this.

The Vulcan nodded, accepting the help, and Kirk found Spock weighed more than he had imagined. The two of them stumbled together across the bridge and back towards the beam-up point, the Vulcan leaning heavily on the Human, concentrating all his efforts on maintaining his mental shields and preventing the Captain from feeling his pain.

They continued their slow way forward until, as they approached

the beam-up point, the smoke became so thick that Kirk found himself unable to breathe. Suddenly, without warning, he collapsed onto the deck. Spock, leaning heavily on the Captain for support, found himself on the deck with the Captain beneath him. Instantly, roused from his concentration by the fall, he became concerned that he might have damaged the more delicate Human. He was relieved to find that Kirk was still breathing, although his breath was coming in laboured gasps, with coughs in between.

Spock tore off his own shirt and tied it over the Human's nose and mouth in an attempt to prevent the smoke from entering. What the Captain needed was oxygen, but there was none available until they got across to the Enterprise. Unable to stand himself, Spock commenced to drag the Captain along the floor. With no-one to see him he put all his effort into the task, and began to move crabwise across the already hot deck plates. Soon he too was feeling the effects of the thick smoke, but his physiology, even injured, was built to withstand hotter temperatures and thinner atmosphere than the Human. He pushed on doggedly.

Sulu, leading the fire-fighting team, found his mind continually worrying over the Captain and the Science Officer. Kirk had disappeared into the thick smoke, and here he was under orders to fight the fire and not to follow the Captain. As time went on he found it more and more difficult to concentrate on the fire-fighting as all his senses reached out into the smoke towards the two senior officers.

Thus, alert to the slightest change in his surroundings, Sulu heard a slow, dragging sound. It took him a few seconds to realise that this could be the men he sought, but when the idea took hold in his brain he found himself moving towards the sound at top speed. A final thought that it could be one of the Orions made him pull out his phaser and set it to stun. What he saw shocked him. Mr. Spock and the new Captain, both without their uniform tops, were sliding slowly across the floor towards him.

Putting away the phaser, Sulu ran to them, ignoring the black smoke that filled his own lungs. He could see that the two men needed help. The Vulcan stopped at his touch, but made no reply to his questions. Sulu realised that it was up to him to get them out of here to where the Enterprise could beam them up.

Catching hold of the Vulcan below both arms, Sulu began to pull with all his strength. Spock was still holding tight to the Captain, and he found the combined weight of the two men almost too much. He hesitated, took out his communicator, and requested immediate beam-up as soon as they got to the unshielded area of the Orion ship, and immediate medical facilities for a Vulcan and a Human patient. Getting his breath again he resumed his task of pulling the senior officers to safety.

As he emerged from the smoke two figures ran towards him, and Sulu found an oxygen mask pushed into his hand. He put it on gratefully. Then the first figure, whom he now recognised as Dr. Piper, concentrated on the two men Sulu had dragged to safety. He bent over Spock and tried to run a medi-scanner over him, but the readings were confused with those of the Human, and he could make nothing of them. Sighing in frustration, he put an oxygen mask over Spock's face, then one over the Captain's, and ordered beam-up.

The five of them materialised in the transporter room, where three trolleys were waiting. Piper moved immediately to Spock's

side, but the Vulcan, recovered a little through breathing the oxygen, had his mind firmly fixed on the Captain. Ignoring his own injuries he ordered Dr. Piper to examine the Human still in his grip. Piper knew Spock needed attention, but as he tried to ignore the Vulcan's order and check him over, Spock became agitated and said,

"It is my fault that he has been hurt. I will not rest until I know he is well again."

Resigned to the Vulcan's stubbornness, Piper turned his attention to the Captain. The results of his scan showed Kirk to be suffering from smoke inhalation and slightly scorched lungs. It was nothing serious. Piper turned to tell the Vulcan so, only to find the man had passed out.

He got Dr. Andersen to look after the Captain, knowing the man was in no danger, and turned all his attention to Spock. As the Human was lifted from the Vulcan's grip - not without some difficulty and resistance from Spock - Piper's scan showed the Vulcan to be suffering from internal injuries and haemorrhaging. He didn't like that at all, and instantly gave the Vulcan a very heavy shot to put him out.

It was with amazement and concern that on arrival in sickbay Piper found Spock coming round from a shot that should have put him out for hours. Putting a gentle arm on Spock's shoulder as he moved his body onto the operating table he said softly, "Stop fighting me, Spock. I can't help you unless you relax."

His words had no effect. The Vulcan was obviously fighting him and the drugs, and without his being fully out to the world Piper knew he could not operate on the internal injuries and stop the bleeding. He tried another shot, risky as it was.

The Vulcan instantly lost consciousness, and Piper started the difficult work of tracking down his injuries and stopping the bleeding. His nurse had already started a blood transfusion, and the electro-cardiograph was hooked up to monitor his heartbeat. Piper was both astonished and frightened when the Vulcan started to come out of the anaesthetic in the middle of the operation. He caught only one word of what Spock mumbled. "Captain." With sudden insight he realised that Spock was still blaming himself for Kirk's injury, and obviously would not rest until he knew that the Captain was well.

Turning to the nurse he asked her to see if the Captain was fit enough to be brought in. If so he wanted him here immediately. She turned and ran into the other ward, returning shortly with a smoke blackened but wide awake Captain.

Piper explained, "Captain Kirk, I'm sorry to drag you in here when you are not fully recovered yourself, but Mr. Spock is fighting me and the anaesthetic for all he's worth, and unless he gives in to it I'm going to lose him. From what he said when we arrived in the transporter room he blames himself for your being injured, and is not aware that you are quite safe. He collapsed before he heard me tell him that you were safe. I need you to get through to him and assure him of your recovery."

Kirk stared at the scene before him: the Vulcan under restraint, yet struggling on the operating table; the doctor, his hands covered in green blood; and the nurse looking in horror at the

readings on the diagnostic panel. It looked like something out of a horror story. He didn't know what to do or say.

"I'm not sure what I can do," said Kirk lamely, feeling out of his depth with both the medical side of things and the fact that Spock was a Vulcan - an alien - something that was patently obvious with that green blood.

But then Spock mumbled something, and only one word came out clearly - "Kirk." The Captain forgot his lack of self-confidence and concentrated on the man on the table.

"Mr. Spock, it's Captain Kirk," he said clearly, bending near to one of those elegant pointed ears. "I'm safe and sound, thanks to you, and I want you to take care of yourself now."

The only response was a further mumbling. "I can't understand what he's saying," said Kirk desperately.

Piper looked at the nurse and ordered her to tie in the universal translator. He then ordered her to go and get some equipment he knew he didn't really need, just to get her out of sickbay. He knew the Vulcan would not wish to be overheard by anyone, and that seemed the only way to ensure that only he and the Captain heard what was said.

The translator worked perfectly; the mumblings became clear. "I must know how the Captain is. I have failed in my duty. I must know. Captain Kirk, I must know!"

Kirk tried again to get through to the Vulcan, without success. Suddenly he remembered their time on the Orion craft, and the sudden pain he had felt when he had touched Spock. That was it. Physical contact. Ignoring the doctor's warning that Spock didn't like to be touched, he leaned forward and picked up a warm, slender hand. Immediately he felt pain, and a stubborn determination, and - was it guilt? - then he was through that to a consciousness that made him hesitate and mentally start to panic.

Spock took over. *Captain Kirk?* he queried, and the 'voice' was soft, caring, and almost disbelieving.

*Yes, Mr. Spock,* he replied, unsure if he had spoken, or if the words were just in his mind, or in the Vulcan's mind.

*How badly are you hurt?* came the next, hesitant question, and behind it Kirk heard and felt a great well of concern - something he had not expected from the aloof, frozen-faced Vulcan.

*I'm fine. It was only the smoke. It's you I'm worried about. You've got to stop fighting the doctor and allow yourself to get well. Do you understand?*

*Yes,* came the quiet reply. *But I had to know if you were safe first. Then the Vulcan added, I cannot understand why you risked your life for me. You are the Captain. You could have sent someone else. I would not have needed rescuing if I had done my duty. I should not have led the boarding party. I should have reported myself unfit for duty. But I wished to be on the bridge - with you - in case I was needed. It was not logical, and the consequences could have meant your death and the deaths of others in my charge. I have not behaved as a true Vulcan, nor as a Starfleet officer. You could have died because of me!*

Kirk tried to reassure him, but when he found words ineffective he tried to project his own feelings in the matter. *I don't care, Mr. Spock. I'm just grateful that you are alive, and I want you to get well. I want you back on the bridge. I need you there. I want you to get well - that's an order.*

The last was said in a mocking tone, a touch of Human humour, and Kirk wondered if it was lost on the Vulcan as he replied, *Aye aye, Captain.* Then Kirk felt Spock relax under his touch, and realised that he had reached him and he had been understood as the Vulcan added, *That is one order it will not be hard to obey.*

*You're joking, Mr. Spock!* said Kirk, reading the Vulcan's own sense of humour in the response and surprised to see it there.

*I admit nothing,* came the reply. The Vulcan added, *If you will excuse me, Captain, I will attempt to obey your last order,* and Kirk found himself gently eased from the Vulcan's mind.

He found he was smiling in response, and Dr. Piper looked at the Captain in wonder as he saw the smile appear on his face and suddenly grow into a big grin. He had heard nothing of the conversation, but realised that somehow the Captain and the Vulcan had communicated. That became obvious from the diagnostic panel. Spock slipped from an uneasy wakefulness into a deep sleep.

"You reached him, Captain," was all Piper said as he turned his attention to the operation in hand and recalled the nurse.

The Captain found himself a 'spare part' in the operating theatre, and returned to the ward. But the smile still lingered on his face. He gave a lot of trouble to the nurse assigned to clean him up, but in spite of all his attempts to return to duty he found himself confined to sickbay under Dr. Piper's orders. Even the Captain couldn't overrule the CMO.

Kirk turned his attention to something that had been niggling him ever since his mental contact with the Vulcan. If Spock cared, not just for him but for all the people he worked with - and he now had no doubt that the Vulcan *did* care, inside at least - then why the incident when he had first come aboard? The young lieutenant, Petersen - that was the young man's name.

Kirk determined to find out more. His curiosity was aroused. First he contacted Mr. Scott; the Chief Engineer should know something about one of his own people. Scott insisted on coming to sickbay to tell him about it, and Kirk found himself intrigued.

Lt. Petersen had attempted to beam aboard the Enterprise with some purchases from a junk shop in Old San Francisco, and had he succeeded the lieutenant would have had to be demoted according to Chapter 32 of Starfleet regulations, which insisted that if anyone beamed aboard with dangerous life-forms that was the minimum punishment.

Somehow the Science Officer had learned that the lieutenant had visited the junk shop and had purchased some old boxes made of inlaid wood, beautiful specimens of the art of marquetry. These jewellery boxes, as they had been called, had contained some rock crystals which looked like semi-precious stones. They were not, however, as beautiful or as innocent as they at first appeared.

They were sand bats from Manark V, which could turn in an instant from inanimate rock crystals to very deadly creatures whose bite could kill a Human. The venom from their bite not only killed the victim, but could be passed from person to person through sweat glands. Had the lieutenant beamed aboard with his purchases the Enterprise could have been in great danger.

Spock had acted on his discovery by contacting the transport area and having the lieutenant beamed to a Starfleet building Spock had prepared for that purpose. There he had taken the jewellery boxes, and under laboratory conditions had opened them and demonstrated the effects on the rock crystals. A very frightened lieutenant had observed the change from inanimate objects to dangerous creatures with amazement and guilt. Spock had disposed of the creatures, and also set in motion security measures to deal with the junk shop. He had then handed Petersen a tape showing the effects of a sand bat bite on Humans, and had given the young man 24 hours within which to report aboard the Enterprise with orders to see Spock before he did anything else.

Scott advised that by taking this action Spock had prevented the lieutenant from committing an offence, had disposed safely of the creatures, had protected the Enterprise's crew from harm, and had taught Petersen a lesson.

"But I don't understand about the references to the regulations," said Kirk finally, having found himself more and more amused as Scott had gone into the explanation.

"'Tis what passes for a sense of humour in a Vulcan, Captain," replied the Engineer, grinning broadly. "Our Mr. Spock can quote every word of every Starfleet regulation ever printed, and he likes to make use of that knowledge. Chapter 32 apparently lays down what should happen to someone transporting dangerous creatures aboard a Starship, while Chapter 48 refers to incidents taking place on a planet. Mr. Spock explained to me that the former insists the man is demoted at the very least, or drummed out of the service if necessary. The latter leaves action to the discretion of the senior officer. By preventing Petersen from beaming aboard the Enterprise, and getting him to beam into the office, Mr. Spock ensured he would not breach the shipboard regulations, and so Mr. Spock would be able to act on his own discretion. However, he had to teach the lad a lesson, and I think that tape - which was pretty horrific if I say so myself - and the reprimand have done the trick. Mr. Petersen has not only learned his lesson, but appears to have joined the select band of Mr. Spock worshippers. He's even attempting to learn the regulations by heart!"

"I see," said Kirk finally. "I think I could find that useful in dealing with a bit of Vulcan insubordination. Thank you, Mr. Scott."

The Engineer looked worried. "'Tis not like Mr. Spock to be insubordinate, Captain."

Kirk laughed outright. "No. Perhaps I should have said deviousness, Mr. Scott."

"Deviousness?" queried the Scotsman, finding this hard to imagine.

"Yes, Mr. Scott. Our Vulcan," and Scott found himself relaxing at that use of the possessive term, "is a very devious man. Two can

play at that game."

Kirk had to explain to Mr. Scott that Spock had reported for duty after the incident with Mr. Troy, although he had known himself to be unfit. "From the best of motives, of course," assured Kirk. "He felt that as a new Captain I would need him on the bridge."

He went on to explain that Spock had been reluctant to take control of the boarding party, and Kirk had thought at the time that this was due to a reluctance to take command; but now he realised it was because he was not feeling very well. He had appeared rather stiff and slow-moving on the bridge, but Kirk had put that down to resentment. "I didn't even ask him if he was okay when he came back from sickbay - I was so busy asking after Mr. Troy. And I didn't give him much chance to explain himself about the boarding party," mused Kirk regretfully. "Perhaps if I'd asked him to explain why rather than giving him a direct order to take command, he'd have come clean. I guess it's as much my fault as his."

"Aye, he's not the easiest of people to understand, Captain, and he tends to keep things to himself. You have to get to know him to read the small signs, but they are there if you look closely. And if you ask the right questions you'll get your answers, for Mr. Spock will not tell a lie, although he might mislead you quite deliberately. Mind you, it's best not to ask him anything personal, or he'll retreat behind the Great Wall of Vulcan, which is harder to prise open than any clam!"

"Thank you, Scotty. I'd be obliged if you'd keep this conversation just between the two of us," concluded Kirk, indicating that the interview was over. If the truth were known Kirk was still pretty tired himself after his ordeal on the Orion ship. He leaned back heavily on the bed as Scott retreated silently from sickbay, a slight smile still on his lips. Scott wished he could be a fly on the wall when the Captain saw the Science Officer; he had a feeling it would be quite a meeting.

The Enterprise reached spacedock and handed over the Orions to the beaming Security Chief, prisoners and rescuers alike. Kirk was glad to see the back of them. In spite of Dr. Piper's warnings to take things easy for a while he had insisted on being present for the docking and for the handover. Piper's comment that he was as stubborn as the Vulcan caused him to smile, but it also turned his thoughts to the decisions he had yet to make.

This little episode had brought him to understand far more of the crew than any interview could possibly have done. He had decided that he definitely wanted to keep some of them aboard - particularly Mr. Scott, Dr. Piper, Mr. Sulu, Mr. Alden and Mr. Spock. His problem on the last was his friend Gary Mitchell. He had already requested Gary's move to the Enterprise as navigator, and it had been his intention to make him First Officer. Now that he had seen Mr. Spock in action, however, he had a very strong feeling that Spock would be the better First Officer. The man was thorough, knew the ship, knew the people, and above all was not afraid to say what he thought, or to act when necessary. The Vulcan's handling of the incidents with Mr. Troy and Mr. Petersen had impressed him.

He reckoned that there was more to Spock than met the eye - and somehow he felt that he could bring out the best in him. Being



honest with himself he had to admit that when he had seen something of the Vulcan's mind he had found himself drawn to the man. Their ways of thinking were miles apart in many ways, but their basic outlook was the same. Honesty, efficiency, curiosity, and a sense of adventure - all these they shared. He had also found Spock's computing ability to be phenomenal. It would be quite something to be able to ask for information and get it without hesitation and without having to wait for a computer readout. Somehow he knew Spock would be better than any computer anyway. Of course, if Spock remained as Science Officer he would still have access to that, but the relationship would not be as close as that with his First Officer.

That was part of his concern. Could he, a Human, have a close relationship, even a working relationship, with a Vulcan or a half-Vulcan? As far as he was aware Vulcans were renowned for their lack of feeling and their unwillingness to become friends with anyone. Their loyalty and their sense of duty were beyond question, and it was known that Vulcans would unhesitatingly risk their own lives for their commanders if that seemed logical. But Kirk would be very much alone as Captain of a Starship, and he knew he needed someone he could share his troubles with without that someone clamming up on him, and without that someone spreading gossip to the rest of the crew. He knew the latter would never be a problem with Spock - the man didn't know the meaning of gossip, and had been very tightlipped about Troy and Petersen. Could he relax with Kirk enough for the two of them to share the burden of command? He didn't know the answer to that. Kirk made up his mind to see the Vulcan again before he made any decision about a First officer.

When he reported to the Admiralty he requested the men he wanted and made it clear that the position of First Officer was the only one he had not made a decision on. It would, however, be a combined post. He didn't clarify the point. However, when he received a summons to the Admiral's office it was to discuss that particular topic.

Admiral Nogura looked at his young Starship Captain appreciatively. Kirk had already performed miracles with the Enterprise in retrieving the Orions. The man had a knack for getting into and out of trouble as quickly as a teenager would fall in and out of love.

"Let me get to the point, Jim," the Admiral began without preamble. "You have selected your senior officers and some of the crew, and I'm doing my damndest to get as many of them as I can for you. It will still mean you have over 300 new people on board when you set off on your mission. But you'll have plenty of time to break them in. You'll be pleased to know that Gary Mitchell has accepted the post of navigator." He studied Kirk intently to see the Captain's reaction. Kirk was very guarded, but the Admiral knew he had been right in asking him here when he saw the indecision appear for just a second in the man's eyes.

"You've got a problem, haven't you, Jim?" he asked.

Kirk sighed. This man knew him almost as well as he knew himself. "I didn't think I was that obvious," he countered.

"Not obvious, Jim. Only someone who knew you well would realise. Do you want to talk about it?"

That was exactly what Kirk wanted to do, and he said so. He

told the Admiral all about the chase after the Orions and Spock's part in it, leaving out the personal details and Spock's being unfit for duty when he returned to the bridge. "Everything he's done has made me feel he would make a perfect First Officer," concluded Kirk.

"But...?" urged Nogura, with just a hint of a smile.

"But I don't know if I could work with a Vulcan, or at least not that closely. I'm trying not to be prejudiced, but a Captain has to rely completely on his First Officer, and I'm not sure I could rely on someone who doesn't smile, thinks it's illogical to say thank you, and won't admit to feeling anything. It would be like working with a computer. And yet, somehow I got the impression that there's more there behind that facade, and it would be my fault if I only got a computer's reaction from him. The Chief Engineer made it plain that the man has a sense of humour and feelings, but just won't admit it. But even he doesn't know the man well. In fact, I understand that after 11 years on the Enterprise not a soul has visited Mr. Spock's quarters, except on matters of ship's business. I guess I'm too Human to cope with that kind of far-off relationship."

"Which leaves you?" continued the Admiral, wanting Kirk to put things into words to clarify them in his own mind.

"Gary..." said Kirk, but with quite a hint of hesitation. "Gary's a good man. He's an excellent navigator and possibly an excellent Captain, but - I'm not so sure he'll make a good First Officer. His trouble is he knows it all, and he's not prepared to listen. He's also pretty hard on those under him. I keep thinking of Lt. Petersen, and somehow I don't think Gary would have tried to save his career. Yet Mr. Spock, the unfeeling Vulcan, went out of his way to do so. Scotty told me Spock considered it illogical to waste Starfleet's training of a prospectively excellent officer unnecessarily. And there's no doubt in my mind that Petersen is a good man, and one day will be an excellent officer, especially now that he has learned an important lesson - but..." Kirk's voice trailed off. "I'm not making much sense, am I?" he added apologetically.

"What you need, Jim," said Nogura, "is another talk with Mr. Spock. I'll give you a week to make your mind up."

Kirk nodded, realising he was being dismissed. He was just about to open the door when Nogura stopped him.

"Jim, I've known Mr. Spock even longer than I've known you. Deep inside that Vulcan is a very special person - one who'll make the best First Officer in the Fleet, and an even better friend. But it's going to take an even more special commander to bring that out of him. He's spent too long avoiding relationships and hiding behind his Vulcan heritage to willingly leave that refuge. When a good Captain - and Chris Pike is an excellent one - spends 11 years with him without succeeding in breaching that wall of Spock's own making, I know it's a chance in a million that anyone can get through. But I believe that the person who finally does it will find that reward enough. Somehow I think you could be that person.

"Of course, you'd not have that problem with Gary. He'd be easy to talk to, and you know him well already. With Gary as First Officer you'd still have Spock on board too, since he has indicated his willingness to remain on the Enterprise as Science Officer. Of course, that's only since the Orion episode. Before that he

reserved judgement."

Kirk let that sink in as he left the Admiral's office. Nogura hoped he had steered the young Captain towards the Vulcan. He truly believed that Gary was wrong for Jim, and that someone like Spock could temper the Captain's impulsiveness with logic. He wasn't too sure about the friendship side, however. Vulcans didn't go in for emotionalism, and friendship was usually based on an emotional response to people.

Kirk made arrangements to visit Spock, and was surprised to learn that the Vulcan was back on duty.

"Vulcan physiology is not like ours," was all Piper had said.

Spock was formality itself when he met the Captain. Kirk risked a sideways look at the Vulcan as he walked by his side. He could see no trace of pain in his face, or anything else for that matter, and there was no outward sign of his injuries.

On impulse Kirk said, "Let's go to my quarters, Mr. Spock. I think we'll be more comfortable there."

The suggestion was met with a raised eyebrow and no comment whatsoever. Inwardly Kirk sighed. Could anyone breach the Great Wall of Vulcan? he wondered. He was going to try. This meeting was going to be the decider.

They entered the turbolift together in silence, and Spock directed it to Deck 5. Several crew members noted their passing, but each group fell silent as the Captain and the Vulcan walked past.

Finally they reached the Captain's cabin. Spock indicated that Kirk should enter first. He wondered that the cabin was ready for him, although Spock obviously had had no inkling that Kirk would meet him here. Or had he?

"Did you prepare a room for our meeting?" asked Kirk, remembering that Scott had said the Vulcan would always answer him truthfully.

"Yes, Captain," was the reply.

Kirk belatedly remembered Scott had also told him that the Vulcan was devious, and he'd have to word his questions carefully if he wanted a straight story. "Which room did you prepare, Mr. Spock?"

"Briefing Room 3," came the instant answer. If Spock thought this a strange line of questioning he didn't comment on it.

Silence reigned again as Kirk indicated that Spock should sit in the easy chair. The coffee table became a physical barrier between them as Spock sat, looking at ease in spite of the fact that his back was stiff and his eyes were planted firmly on the Captain's face.

"I'm glad to see you recovered," said Kirk, hoping to make an opening and ease his own tension.

Spock nodded. This was not going to be easy, thought Kirk. As he watched the Vulcan, unsure how to proceed himself, he suddenly became aware that the man was not as at ease as he at first appeared. Spock steepled and then unsteeped his fingers. He then broke eye contact with Kirk, to the Captain's relief, and instead looked at his hands. After a long pause, during which Kirk became more and more fascinated with the tiny signs of tension he had at first failed to observe, the Vulcan spoke.

"I regret failing in my duty, Captain. Although I have indicated a desire to remain on the Enterprise, I shall transfer immediately if you so wish."

Kirk was completely taken aback. He had thought that particular matter solved. He remembered Scott's words about Vulcan honesty and Vulcan memory. So that was what was causing the tension!

"Mr. Spock," he began, and was surprised at the intensity of the look the Vulcan gave him in response, as though the man was hanging on his every word. Kirk swallowed hard before continuing. "I do not consider you to have failed in your duty, and I consider the matter dropped."

"Nevertheless," persisted the Vulcan, "I misled both the doctor and yourself by reporting fit for duty when I knew myself not to be so, and I thereby endangered this ship and its crew. Such a breach of discipline cannot be ignored."

Kirk met the brown eyes and saw that they were veiled. No inkling of Spock's motivation showed through. Kirk considered Spock's handling of Lt. Petersen, and found his own answer.

"I acknowledge the breach of discipline, Mr. Spock, and have not ignored it. However, the penalty for such a breach is at the discretion of the senior officer." He hoped fervently that it was, since he'd never read the regulations on such a case - or if he had, he couldn't remember them.

"I have decided to drop the matter because to pursue it would put me in a difficult position myself. You see, when I gave you a direct order to take command of the boarding party I did not allow you to give your reasons for not wishing to do so. I was therefore technically in breach of discipline myself. Now you wouldn't want a new Captain to be reported in breach of discipline on his first command, would you, Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan looked down and shook his head, the motion so minute as to be almost indiscernible.

"Well, I can't report you unless I report myself. However," Kirk had difficulty keeping a straight face, and was glad the Vulcan was still looking down, "I hope you have learned a lesson from this, and will not try to deceive anyone as to your state of health in the future."

"For my part," added Kirk, unable to keep from grinning, "I shall try to remember to ask you for an explanation of your actions when I do not understand them. I hope you will do me the courtesy of doing the same."

Spock looked up to see the Captain smiling gently, almost encouragingly, at him. He was at a loss to understand the smile.

Human smiles meant to many different things at different times. He decided to avail himself of the Captain's suggestion.

"Why are you smiling, Captain?" he asked.

Kirk stared at him in disbelief, then he found the question so humorous that he burst out laughing. When he finally regained control, to watch an eyebrow slowly rise into the Vulcan's hairline, he felt he owed the man an explanation.

"I am smiling, Mr. Spock, because I find the situation fairly analogous to your conversation with Lt. Petersen." Spock's eyebrow disappeared completely. "I misunderstood you on that occasion, and I want us to avoid similar misunderstandings in future."

"I have another question then, Captain," said Spock slowly. Kirk had to wait a few moments before Spock actually asked it. "Why did you smile at me when I reported for duty on the bridge?"

Kirk remembered the incident when Spock had seemed surprised. "I would have smiled at any member of the crew reporting for duty, Mr. Spock. I was pleased to see you."

"That is not logical," stated the Vulcan without moving a muscle.

"I didn't expect you to smile back, Mr. Spock," declared Kirk with a grin. "It is natural for me to smile at my crew when they join me on the bridge. I see no reason to treat you any differently from anyone else. However, I also realise that it is not natural for you to smile back, and I wouldn't expect you to treat me differently from anyone else, either. Is that a deal, Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan studied him carefully before replying. "I had not considered it from your point of view, Captain. I am inclined to forget that my fellow crewmembers are not Vulcan. I have no wish to be treated differently from any other member of your crew, although I cannot promise to react as they would."

"Fair enough, Mr. Spock," said Kirk, still grinning. Then he became serious again. "Would you enjoy working with me as your Captain, Mr. Spock?" he asked earnestly.

"Enjoy, Captain?" came the response. "Enjoyment is a Human emotion. I do not foresee any major difficulties in my working with you, or I should not have indicated a willingness to remain on board."

"I see," said Kirk, taken aback again. "There's just one question I'd like to ask you, Mr. Spock. I hope you don't think it's too personal."

He saw the Vulcan retreat immediately into the shell he had been in when Kirk had first come on board. The muscles of his face which had, Kirk suddenly realised, relaxed, became taut, and the brown eyes were again guarded. Kirk pushed on regardless.

"I would like to know why you took the action you did with Lt. Petersen." He had heard Scott's reasons, but wanted to hear this from Spock himself.

Spock relaxed visibly. He had, Kirk realised, expected a question on why he had chosen to serve on the Enterprise, or perhaps

on his background. Kirk realised that such questions would be an unwarranted intrusion into what was obviously a very private area of the man's life.

Without hesitation the Vulcan replied, "I believe Lt. Petersen to have the makings of a good officer, and I did not wish Starfleet to waste the money invested in his training through a careless act on the lieutenant's part. I believe he will act less rashly in future."

"Do you know how much Starfleet has invested in his training?" asked Kirk trying to make light of the question.

"Indeed, Captain. Starfleet has..."

"That was a joke, Mr. Spock," interrupted Kirk. "What was your real reason?"

"I believe I have stated my reason, Captain," Spock said stiffly.

"You're not going to admit that you wanted to give him a second chance, or that you used regulations to make that possible?"

"Starfleet regulations are quite specific, Captain. They have not been breached in any way."

"No, of course not, Mr. Spock. Well, in that case I don't think I'll admit the real reason why I'm going to do what I'm going to do, Spock; but I thought you should be the first to know. I've decided to make you my First Officer."

If he expected a reaction, he was disappointed. Spock stared back at him, his face like stone.

"As you wish, Captain."

"Are you pleased with the appointment?" asked Kirk, realising as he said it that the question could also be termed 'emotional'. Before Spock could answer he added, "I mean, are you willing to accept the appointment? I thought you could combine the roles of Science Officer and First Officer."

The Vulcan was pleased - very pleased. But it was not with the appointment itself. It was something about this particular man that pleased him, and he could not explain why, not in logic. The appointment would give him a better chance of knowing Kirk, and that was important to him. But, he suddenly remembered, Kirk had a friend who was lined up to be First Officer.

"I understood that Mr. Mitchell was to be your First Officer," said Spock, making it a statement but asking it as though it was a question.

"I'm glad to see that you keep up to date with things, Mr. Spock. Mr. Mitchell is to be the new navigator. However, I have decided that you are better suited to the position of First Officer."

"Why?" was Spock's surprising question.

Kirk had not expected to be asked. He guessed that was one of the reasons why he had chosen Spock over Gary. The Vulcan was not

afraid to ask when he didn't understand, or when something did not seem logical to him. Kirk needed a second in command who would question him rather than agreeing blindly to everything. And Spock's questions seemed to be as logical as the man himself.

"Because you are not afraid to ask questions; and because I think your logic will temper my impetuosity; and - irrational as this may sound, Mr. Spock - because I have a feeling, a very Human feeling, that we are going to make an excellent partnership, and may possibly even become the best of friends."

Both Spock's eyebrows rose simultaneously, and Kirk was surprised to see a deep green tinge colour the tips of those elegant ears. With sudden insight he realised that Spock had had the same feeling, although he was unlikely to admit it. Well, why not? After all, when they had linked minds Kirk had seen that the man did possess feelings, and very strong ones too.

"I will be honoured to accept the post of First Officer," said the Vulcan finally, hiding behind the formality of the reply. Inside a warmth was growing that threatened to break through his Vulcan mask.

"I'm very glad, Mr. Spock," said Kirk, lightly touching the Vulcan's shoulder.

Spock jumped at the contact, terrified that Kirk would be able to see into his mind. But his shields were already in place, and they were strong. Kirk didn't need to read Spock's mind to realise that he had touched the man, the real man behind the mask.

"That's settled, then," said Kirk. "Let's go and inspect the rest of our ship. After all, we didn't manage to complete the inspection last time."

Spock rose in one graceful movement and followed his Captain into the corridor. He gave no outward sign of the pleasure he felt, and knew he would spend a long time in meditation to regain his composure. But somehow this new Captain had managed to break through his toughest defences, and Spock knew that the Human realised what he had done. Somehow it didn't matter.

The tour was completed in companionable silence, both men basking in their new-found understanding.

On their return to Earth Kirk reported his decision to Admiral Nogura. The Admiral was delighted, and said so in no uncertain terms.

"Have you told the rest of the crew?" he asked.

Kirk shook his head. "I thought Spock would tell them. Now that he knows he's bound to tell."

"I'm not so sure you've made the right decision, then, because you don't seem to know your new First Officer very well," said Nogura, only the smile on his face belying the seriousness of the comment. "That Vulcan is like a clam. No-one but him will know unless you make a point of telling them. Spock'll probably go on as though he's Science Officer until someone falls over the official notice making him First Officer, or until it's his duty to inform

someone. I'm told that when Chris Pike made him Lieutenant-Commander he held the post for four months before anyone else on board realised he'd been promoted."

Kirk's hazel eyes lit up. Nogura was right. "I'll make a point of telling everyone," he parried.

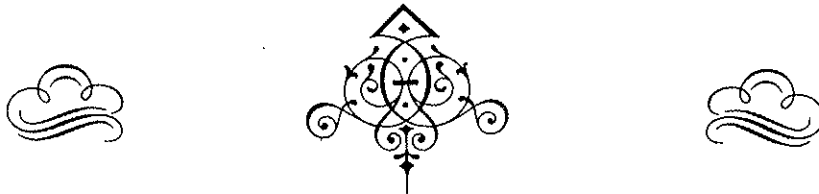
"Including Gary?" Nogura asked with the same insight.

"Yes," said Kirk, very quietly. "Including Gary."

Nogura could tell that Kirk was sure of his decision, although worried about how to tell his friend. "You'll have your orders within the week, Jim, and Gary will be here before you leave. Good luck - and my compliments to you and your First Officer. Look after the Enterprise for me. She's my best ship."

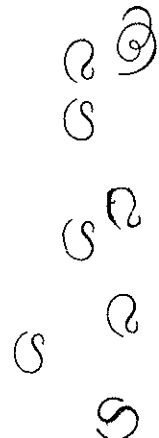
Nogura cut off communications and his picture faded, leaving a blank grey-brown screen behind. Kirk studied his own reflection in it, as he had done in the mirror several days before. This time the hazel eyes that looked back at him did not seem so young, and he no longer cared that he was the youngest Captain in Starfleet. He had the best ship in the Fleet, and he had potentially the best First Officer. He was ready to command, and looked forward to his five-year mission with pleasure. There was a whole new world out there to explore, both on the Enterprise itself and beyond, where no man had gone before.

Kirk was ready.



### WARP AND WEFT - SPOCK AND T'PRING

Can there be anything at all  
Between you and me  
Except the joining of bloodlines  
To enrich the race?  
Does it matter at all  
To those unseen powers  
Which proscribe our destinies  
If we are happy with each other?  
As long as it completes  
The pattern of the ages  
On the loom of the stars,  
Woven before you and I  
Were even born,  
What do they care?



Sheryl Peterson





# WHO CAN STAND AGAINST THESE TWO?

Wherever he goes you will be beside him  
 He will never travel the galaxies alone  
 He is used to having you at his right shoulder  
 Standing very straight hands clasped loosely behind you  
 As the two of you speculate on a new situation  
 Yours are the data his are the decisions

You are the one who can offer evaluation  
 A fathomless mine of facts and you are the one  
 Who has looked death in the face in many guises  
 Unmoved as stone and continued without haste  
 Your accurate progress to the precise conclusion  
 That solves a problem and may save a world

He is the one for imaginative leaps  
 For brilliant bluffs and desperate inventions  
 He has sworn his oath to tolerance as a principle  
 He keeps fast hold on faith in every nature  
 Makes it the corner-stone of negotiation  
 And his persuasiveness has ended wars

You if you do so choose can open doors  
 Into another's mind and speak to it wordlessly  
 Curious to learn its urgent motivations  
 Fascinated by thought in whatever form  
 You are his undaunted interpreter  
 You put into his hand a priceless key

He sees into the hearts of those who serve him  
 And values all of them for what they are  
 Honours the human and alien alike  
 A confidence made to him does not go further  
 To protect the inner freedom of another  
 He can keep a secret even from himself

Yours is the Vulcan strength that stands between him  
 And the strangest perils Yours the devotion to logic  
 And pure pursuit of the truths beyond emotion  
 And he is well aware of what he owes you  
 To you alone would he entrust his honour  
 His valuation of you pays his debt

In a seemingly hopeless place he finds the answer  
 Blank walls for him have been known to become transparent  
 Bitter antagonists have learnt co-existence  
 And you have discovered a gossamer thread can be stronger  
 Than steel when it links your heart in darkness and silence  
 To a love which deliberately leaves you your soul's freedom

You will not die you Visitors from the future  
 Who travel for ever the spaces between the stars  
 And take to creation's most outlandish borders  
 An offer of love and help to all things living  
 The gates of hell shall not prevail against you  
 Descending to walk the surface of new planets  
 You leave immortal footprints in their dust.

Pac Deacon

